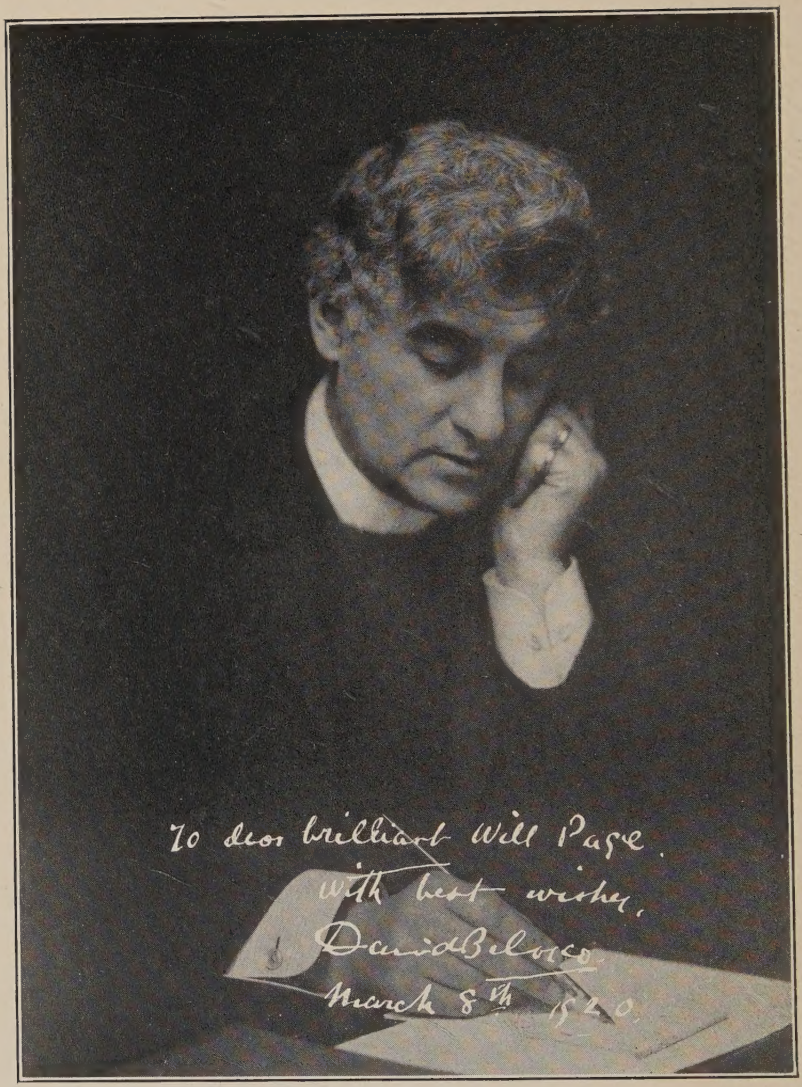
BEHIND THE CURTAINS OF BROADWAY'S BEAUTY TRUST

BY WILL A. PAGE



DAVID BELASCO

The dean of all producing managers.

BEHIND THE CURTAINS OF THE BROADWAY BEAUTY TRUST

By

WILL A. PAGE

•

With an Introduction by

JACK LAIT

•

Including Several Letters by

BERNARD SHAW

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To C. B. D.

from

W. A. P.

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PREFACE

By Jack Lait

Herewith are the intimate, serio-comic revelations and confessions of a Broadway Boccacio. For twenty years Will A. Page has worked, played—and chuckled—behind the scenes of that phenomenon of the modern theatre which he calls the Beauty Trust.

The "girl revue," wonder child of the old "musical comedy," has become a gigantic institution. Eight stupendous revues, and scores of lesser ones, blaze anew on Broadway every autumn. The cost of producing one of them would have beggared P. T. Barnum. Millionaires have gone bankrupt backing them. One scene alone may call for thousands. The public, in return, pays millions to see them, sometimes at a smashing price per "see." Other millions are invested in the properties that house them. The institution is, literally, a billion-dollar gamble.

This is the Beauty Trust, so called because the keystone of the colossus is feminine beauty. These millions are risked and lost and won, and risked again, on a pretty face or form, which yesterday perhaps graced the village drug store in some small middle-western town or a tenement in Brooklyn.

Who are these American Cinderellas? By what magic are they made famous? Who picks them, and

how? What secret transforms the little unknown of to-day into the star of to-morrow? How do they really live? Do they all marry millionaires, or end in oblivion? Or do they vanish into humdrum domesticity with $20-a-week husbands? What, in brief, is the actual truth about Broadway's hothouse flowers and the men who make them bloom?

These are only a few of the questions Mr. Page answers, giving names, facts and figures hitherto carefully guarded from the public. As former press agent, counsellor and confidant of "Flo" Ziegfeld and Morris Gest, as the present representative of Charles Dillingham, as the associate of every other kingpin of the past two decades on the Great White Way, he has shared their secrets and those of their stars, show girls, chorus cuties, matinee idols, operatic divas, and other bright figures that have glittered, and still glitter, in the Beauty Trust's firmament.

Mr. Page takes his readers into back-stage and off-stage episodes in the careers of the world's most celebrated beauties. He paints veracious and unique character portraits of Broadway's leading producers. Frankly and honestly a press agent of the new school, which never dupes a newspaper, never fakes a line of news, but frequently and startlingly "makes" news, he gives the inside story of the Twentieth Century's most dazzling publicity stunts. Some of them were funny. Some of them were tragic. More than one was a boomerang that whirled around and bowled over the beauty who flung it.

Mr. Page discusses from a fresh and wholly truthful angle, such disputed subjects as the gold digger, the stage mother, the millionaire society girl with a yearn for a career, and the ever-present "temperament" with its back-stage background of hasty weddings, speedy divorces, kisses, quarrels, law-suits, and the vain squandering of huge sums by "angels" on the subjects of their adoration.

Photographs, many of them exclusive, of the Beauty Trust's fairest representatives and snapshots of their participation in the stunts that "made" them, illustrate Mr. Page's rollicking, true-life story.

CHAPTER I

Explaining the Book

Many people of intelligence, and others, will perhaps ponder upon the why and the wherefore of this book. It will perhaps be argued that too many books are already printed to glut the desks of reviewers and crowd the shelves of those who will buy any kind of a book. But back of this particular publication there is an idea that will possibly justify me in writing it, aside from the natural desire of all writers to sell their wares to the best advantage.

That idea is to correct in the minds of 115,000,000 people (if it is ever read by that number of persons) an opinion which seems to prevail regarding conditions in and about the theatre. This impression has been carefully cultivated for many years by the writers of fiction and the editors of magazines that print stories with the theatre as a background. An entirely false world of the theatre exists in the minds of readers of such literature who never used a theatre pass nor met an actress face to face. Even writers of international renown have made laughable mistakes in describing what they conceive to be the world of the theatre. Such mistakes have been fostered and encouraged by unscrupulous magazine editors who have found that stories of stage life, however unreal,

have a fascination for those who have never stepped behind the scenes and know nothing of the reality that exists there. Readers in small towns, patrons of the theatre in remote places, revel in the alleged descriptions of the gay life. They clutch to their bosoms anything that purports to deal with the mysteries of the theatre. And all the time they do not know that they are wading through a literary morass of miserable mush that is as false as the scenery of a theatre itself.

Even Theodore Dreiser himself, perhaps America's foremost author, has been guilty of printing mistakes about the theatre that seem child-like to the experienced manager or player. In "Sister Carrie" he is guilty of no less than eight absurd errors dealing with life on the stage. If he contemplated writing a novel about the steel mills, Dreiser would probably spend six months in a steel town. If he intended to write regarding surgical matters, he would probably make sure of his facts first. But he, like most other authors, seems to believe that the world of the stage is an open book, and he proceeds to write about things he does not understand and has never studied.

For instance, when Sister Carrie is a chorus girl at the Casino, helping to support the worthless ingrate with whom she had eloped, he has her stop at the box office of the theatre and ask the "cashier" for her month's salary. If any Shubert chorus girl stopped at the Casino and asked for the "cashier"—whoever that may be—and told him she wished to have her "month's" salary, he would probably tear his hair if he had any and notify Mr. Shubert that

a crazy woman was trying to hold up the box office. It may seem superfluous—but necessary—to explain that salaries are paid by the week; that the treasurer of a theatre is not a cashier and never pays salaries to any member of any company; that any chorus girl wanting an advance has to apply to her company manager and then probably she will experience great difficulty in securing it—if at all.

Furthermore even Dreiser still dreams that there are green rooms in New York theatres. Sister Carrie is lolling in the green room smoking a cigarette, drinking a glass of wine, when she is notified that as the understudy she must play the star's part. She does it, making such a hit overnight that the managers fight for her services. I have never seen a green room in a New York theatre in twenty-five years. To me they suggest the days of David Garrick, when Lords and Kings might visit their mistresses who pretended to be actresses. But if any stage manager caught a girl smoking a cigarette back stage to-day—even if she were lucky enough to find a green room in which to loll—he would probably fire her, the city fireman would eject her, and the girl would be discharged for drinking.

But Mr. Dreiser is not the only offender among the authors, even though he does have Sister Carrie become famous overnight to such an extent that the manager of Broadway's leading hotel calls upon her and offers her free of charge a suite of five rooms and all expenses paid, even her maid's, just to advertise the hotel by living in it. Such an offer to-day would be instantly accepted by dozens of young

actresses who now wonder many times how they can pay their bills. But Mr. Dreiser's mistakes are not vital. They only illustrate one reason why I have written this book.

Another popular tradition which exists among authors who know nothing about stage life is that the manager permits flocks of men about town in immaculate evening clothes to stand in the wings during a performance and watch the chorus girls work and make dates to take them out to supper. As a matter of fact, in all of the big musical productions, the Erlanger, Dillingham and Ziegfeld shows, the rule prevails that no one shall ever be permitted back-stage during a performance. I remember when a cousin of the King of Spain visited New York a year or two ago and one member of his entourage made a suggestion to me that the cousin of the King of Spain would love to go behind the scenes and mingle with the chorus and watch the performance from the wings. When I put the suggestion up to Mr. Dillingham he replied briefly:

"I would not let even the King of Spain himself go back-stage, so why bother with his cousin?"

I have always hoped that some day an author who really knows about the theatre and stage life would depict stage life as it really is. Such absurd mistakes and downright slanders which many authors commit in their endeavors to describe life behind the scenes should be eliminated, even if it becomes necessary to employ a theatrical censor.

The nearest approach to reality in describing conditions behind the scenes is to be found in the works

of Rupert Hughes, but then he has written successful plays himself, notably "Excuse Me," and of course knows the ropes from the inside. He would never be guilty of the offenses of the inexperienced.

A recent blurb to offend in this particular, for instance, was printed in *Liberty Magazine,* and it gave the local Rialto something to laugh about for many weeks. The author is George Kibbe Turner —an entertaining and vivid writer when he deals with familiar ground. But he, like many others, is all at sea when it comes to Broadway.

His story was called "No Questions Asked." And now, dear readers, and especially the 12,000 unemployed actresses who want to be adopted by Mr. Browning—get ready for a shock. Out of a clear sky the great theatrical manager picks a comet. A young girl without any previous experience walks into an agent's office; she is just the "type" a certain great manager has been looking for. She is sent to his studio for a conference. At first I thought Mr. Turner was going to ring in dear Mr. Belasco as the wicked theatrical manager, because the description of the studio—almost like a monastery of the Middle Ages—seemed to suggest the celebrated nook on the roof of the Belasco Theatre, where the Great Genius entertains only his most intimate friends.

But no, the wicked manager is not dear Mr. B.; he speaks with a foreign accent; he suggests Svengali as he outlines his plans to the timid young girl, pale as a lily, with great dark eyes that resemble deep pools of purple passsion. He offers to make her famous, the talk of the town, and etc., the favorite

plot of all of these magazine authors, faithfully followed to give a thrill to the stage-struck girls in the hick cities. Yes, of course, the Great Manager would do all this, but there are two conditions: the Young Novice must do everything she is told to do —and she must ask No Questions. Will she do this?

Ah, reader, pause; think; here is a young girl on the threshold of life, seeking a career, lured into a manager's office, promised stardom, fame and riches, and all for what—"No Questions Asked."

We pause five minutes to let the situation penetrate.

It is supposed to be a novel idea; a new variation of the old question, "Well, sister, what about it? Will you accept the conditions?"

A convulsive shudder makes the white shoulders tremble; the limpid pools of passion shed a tear; thoughts of the old home, mother, the little house among the hollyhocks makes her senses reel; but Fame beckons, the manager is leering at her. Will she sign on the dotted line?

She signs.

Now, up to the present time, Mr. Turner has followed the general outline of such balderdash quite accurately. We know you are expecting to hear of what happened in the bedroom scene the night she became a star. But that is where even this ridiculous mess becomes easily the most absurd rot ever peddled by any author who pretends to write for intelligent people.

For listen, children, the wicked manager does not desire that the Young Angel shall, as the saying is,

"give herself to him." He only wants her as a lure for a stock broker, to act as a decoy for a bucket shop, on the theory that if she becomes a great actress, men will follow the tips he gives her, and play the market. She will win a fortune for the wolf of Wall Street, and then he will leave her penniless, a fraud, an outcast, a ruined star. Why? I don't know. Perhaps I don't understand Wall Street. But I faithfully submit that any one in the least familiar with theatrical life as it really is will pronounce this fantastic story not only laughable, but a silly libel on the theatrical profession. The Actors' Equity Association should appoint a committee whose duty it should be to persuade editors to stop printing such absurd and scandalous romances involving "actresses" and reflecting upon the private lives of stage stars.

Mr. Turner also draws a picture of the modern theatrical press agent which is emphatically untrue, and which also induced me to write this book. He introduces a press agent who is described as being "short, fat, bald and obsequious," with a "cunning smile" and "a knowing wink," and goodness knows how many other sly attributes, including a "leer."

Now, press agents may be fat, just as some critics may be fat. I believe, to be exact, that there are more fat critics in New York than there are fat press agents, but obesity is not a crime. However, in the interests of accuracy, and to prove to Mr. Turner that the average theatrical press agent is not as he has pictured him, look at such slender press agents as the solemn Claude Greneker, of the Shuberts; the dignified Frank Reid, the tall Malcolm Douglass

(generally referred to as the Human String Bean); the almost cadaverous Nils Granlund, mentioned once as Barnum's Living Skeleton, and press agent for Marcus Loew; Willard Holcomb, prominent member of the Theatre Press Representative Association; the dignified Clarence Hyde, who seems almost ministerial; the veteran Frank Wilstach, who is six feet tall and weighs about a hundred and thirty, and countless other press agents whose appearance gives the lie to Mr. Turner's description. True, there are exceptions. I believe I am one, having been mistaken several times for Percy Hammond; but since he is a critic, I should be flattered, and I deny that I have a "leer."

I can only surmise, therefore, that when Mr. Turner wrote his description of the theatrical press agent, he was as ignorant of this branch of stage life as he seems to be regarding everything else in the theatrical world.

In any event, there can be no doubt that fiction has cast ridicule upon the stage. It has made the great world believe that it is full of scandals, boils and sores. It has cast reflection upon a great army of worthy men and women who are leading clean lives and endeavoring in their small way to uplift the drama, entertain the public, and make a decent living for themselves at the same time.

True, there have been exceptions. If a shop girl or a stenographer or any other young woman out of work becomes involved in a scandal, she always claims that she is an "actress." The headline writers for the newspapers, especially the tabloids, love that

word "actress" because through years of exploitation they have taught their readers to believe only the worst the moment the word "actress" is mentioned.

I have been in the theatrical business for twenty-five years; and I am proud and happy to have been associated with the many clean-living, right-thinking, serious-minded people who take their profession seriously. I believe statistics have already been printed to show that there is a greater percentage of immorality among clergymen than among actors. I believe the average girl in a chorus is better protected than a salesgirl in a big department store, a stenographer working in an office, or a cloak model who has to entertain visiting buyers. Yet these slanders and these stories—by newspaper writers and magazine authors—have continued unchallenged for many years. It is not with the idea that I am some Sir Galahad riding to the defense of a helpless heroine that I am writing this. It is rather to tell the actual truth about stage life as I have seen it, and as it is to-day. Some of it is amusing; some of it is sad; but all of it is true.

And that is why I have written this book.

CHAPTER II

The Beauty Trust and Mr. Dillingham

The Great Billion Dollar Beauty Trust—as I would describe in the composite the producing of musical attractions on Broadway to-day—is, like many other corporations, composed of many smaller organizations, controlled by individuals. Some of them may be partners in one enterprise, yet opposed to each other in a different venture. And all are secretly in a constant battle for supremacy in securing the choicest prizes in the beauty market and in the exploitation of talent.

There are perhaps a dozen outstanding figures in the Trust, with a hundred lesser lights who distribute their own production through the theatres of the bigger producing managers, but it is with the Big Six of the Breauty Trust that I will deal first before going into the details of productions and life behind the scenes.

The leading producers of the Big Girl shows on Broadway to-day are:

A. L. Erlanger, the brains of what was called "the syndicate," whose musical productions for nearly thirty years have been marvels of extravagance and whose wealth runs far into the millions.

Charles Dillingham, who has made a fortune with the Fred Stone shows in twenty years and who to-day

CHARLES BANCROFT DILLINGHAM

One of America's foremost producing managers.

has the two outstanding hits among the musical productions on the great white way—Marilyn Miller in "Sunny" and Fred Stone in "Criss-Cross."

Florenz Ziegfeld, famous founder of the Follies, whose productions for the past twenty years as gorgeous girl spectacles have made his name as famous around the world as Ivory Soap, Cuticura, Velvet Tobacco, Camel Cigarettes or White Rose Tea.

George White, who elevated himself first to stardom through his unique ability as a dancer and his pleasing personality, only to become a manager, produce the "Scandals" every year, and who now has three theatres under his control.

Earl Carroll, a young song-writer and author, who staked his last thousand dollars on an advertisement for a production he had written, and attracted a millionaire backer who built him his own theatre; and who has won a small fortune with the annual productions of the gorgeous girl shows known as the Earl Carroll Vanities.

Jacob J. Shubert, younger brother of Lee Shubert, whose elaborate musical extravaganzas for the Winter Garden and other Shubert Theatres, have been acclaimed as among the most gorgeous girl exhibitions ever known.

There are, of course, many others who produce occasional shows; but these six men measure up as the outstanding directors and producers of the Big Girl shows.

Back of them I should mention one figure whose name seldom appears in print in connection with a

legitimate production—Edward F. Albee, pioneer of vaudeville and the head of the Albee system of theatres. For while he does not deal directly in musical shows, practically every big star of to-day appearing in musical comedy was developed by Mr. Albee in his vaudeville theatres. He discovered them; and after they made hits in vaudeville, they were grabbed by the producing managers. But Mr. Albee does not seem to mind; when his vaudeville stars desert him for the Big Girl shows, he goes right ahead developing new material. The average theatre-goer, seeing such celebrated stars as Fannie Brice, Eddie Cantor, Leon Errol, Will Rogers, Fred Stone, and dozens of others, does not realize they all received their first big chance in vaudeville playing in Mr. Albee's theatres.

Of all the producing managers named, Charles Dillingham is the most retiring of all. He is seldom seen in public; he is never interviewed; he sees his new productions for the first time from a gallery seat. He lives in a beautiful home just off Park Avenue, and he has hundreds of friends not identified with the theatrical world. While he is of the theatre, his private life is a thing apart. Yet he is by no means a recluse. He enjoys the reputation of being one of the wits of Broadway. No matter what the subject, Dillingham has an apt and an amusing reply. He once told me he would be always happy if he could be sure of getting two good laughs a day.

I feel that I can speak frankly about him when I say that he gave me the first theatrical engagement I ever had, on Christmas Day, 1902, in Rochester,

MARILYN MILLER

America's musical comedy sweetheart in "Sunny."

New York, as the business manager for the late Henry Miller. In all the time since then I have never seen him lose his temper. Other managers rave at rehearsals, and storm at actors or stage hands when things go wrong. "C. B.," as his intimates are priviliged to call him, never does one of these things. He never argues. He always says to the other fellow, "You're right." Then he walks out on the show. Once in Buffalo with a certain star, Dillingham suggested changes in a scene. The star objected and tried to argue. Dillingham simply told him to play it his own way, took the train to New York, and never went near the show again, although it cost him more than a hundred and twenty thousand dollars. The star who was so sure of himself hasn't had an engagement in several years.

In the days when Dillingham managed Fritzi Scheff, he was a model of diplomacy. Madame Fritzi, as we used to call her, was quite temperamental; she had been called "the Little Devil of Grand Opera," and she would have made almost any manager lose his temper. Of her more anon. "C. B." handled her adroitly for six years. He has also been the personal friend and manager of Fred Stone for more than twenty years, and they have never had a written contract nor a quarrel. The Beau Brummel of the stage, as he has often been called (although he dislikes the title because the Beau was always in debt and C. B. is worth a fortune)—Dillingham is to-day the representative courteous American gentleman who might be mistaken for a banker, a broker,

a society pet—but never, according to the ideas of fiction writers—a typical theatrical manager.

Mr. Dillingham is a former newspaper man, a native of Hartford, worked as a dramatic critic on the New York *Sun,* and then became a business manager for the late Charles Frohman, who learned to love him like a brother. Frohman used to take C. B. with him to Europe just to have C. B. tell him funny stories. Then he gave him an interest in one of his productions in return for managing it. The show made a fortune, and the career of Charles Dillingham as a theatrical producer began. He has handled some of our best known stars: Maxine Elliott, Fritzi Scheff, Henry Miller, Frank Daniels, Fred Stone, Florence Reed, Gaby Des Lys—so many that it is difficult to recall all of them. From his profits he built the Globe Theatre, at Broadway and Forty-sixth Street, and there he spends most of his time, in his private office, directing his affairs, listening to Jerome Kern play the piano for him, or Otto Harbach tell him funny stories. He is one theatrical manager no actor every criticized adversely; he is without question the best loved producing manager in New York to-day. Even though I have been with him many years, and may perhaps be prejudiced, I do not believe anyone will contradict this assertion.

Photo by White

FLORENZ ZIEGFELD

The world-famous producer of the "Ziegfeld Follies."

CHAPTER III

Mr. Ziegfeld and the Follies

Florenz Ziegfeld for more than twenty years has been exploiting his own name with such an extraordinary enthusiasm and vehemence that now it has been established as a synonym for beautiful women.

In the early days of his career, the name of Ziegfeld and the Follies meant also a musical entertainment for tired business men which should represent almost the possible limit of what could decently be done upon the stage.

Since his marriage to beautiful Billie Burke, a few years ago, the atmosphere of the Follies has changed so that naughtiness is not tolerated and more attention is paid to beauty of scenes and to gorgeousness of gowns, with, of course, the fairest flowers that could be collected in the garden of girls. The beneficial influence of Miss Burke is obvious. In other words, Mr. Ziegfeld will not allow a line or a scene in the Follies, which could not be heard and seen by his wife and his lovely little daughter, Patricia.

The early history of the Follies is something with which few theatre goers of the present day are familiar, in all probability, and since in my own career it has been my lot to prepare and publish a great deal of material for the Follies—and since I once started to write a biography of that remarkable per-

sonality, Florenz Ziegfeld, perhaps a few words may prove of interest.

Mr. Ziegfeld, as perhaps you know, is from Chicago, the son of a famous father bearing the same name, who founded the Chicago Musical College and was its head for many years.

Raised in an atmosphere of music, and with an appreciation for the artistic, young Mr. Ziegfeld at the time of the World's Fair came to New York to try and make his own fortune.

He told me once that he stood outside the Casino Theatre, looking at the bill boards announcing Sandow, the Strong Man. His entire capital consisted of less than fifty dollars, and it was the hot summer of 1893.

He spent fifty cents to see the marvel; that fifty cents made him a fortune.

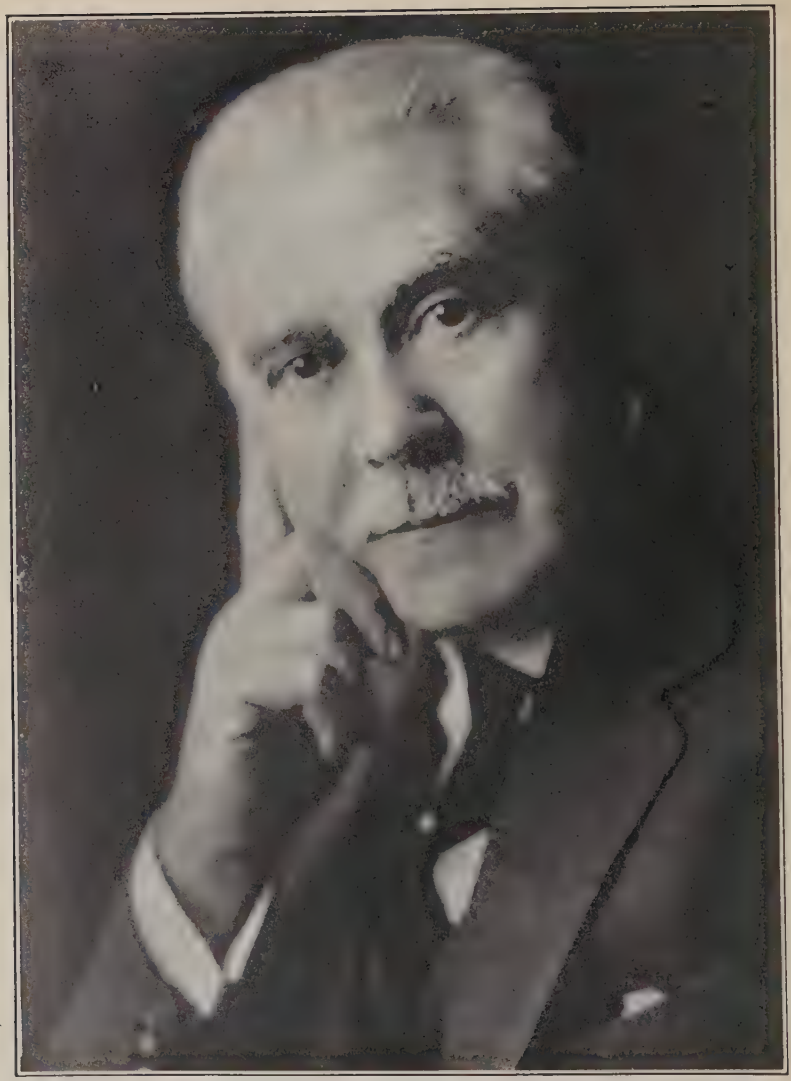
Sandow was under the management of Abbey, Schoeffel and Grau, the grand opera impressarios, who presented him with the dignity they would accord Parsival. Naturally business was poor. The house was almost empty, but Ziegfeld believed he had found a wonderful drawing card if exploited by circus methods.

He tried to book Sandow for a theatre in Chicago which he knew was empty; the managers were willing to farm him out at a thousand dollars a week. Ziegfeld was practically broke, but wouldn't admit it.

He countered with a percentage proposition; he would pay Sandow ten percent of the gross receipts. The grand opera managers were glad to get him off their hands, and they agreed.

BERYL HALLEY

Whose appearance as "Eve" created much excitement on Broadway.



SAMUEL F. KINGSTON

For many years General Manager of "Ziegfeld Follies"

The first week in Chicago, Sandow, exploited at the head of a vaudeville bill, treated like a circus, with World's Fair crowds to draw from, played to over $30,000. Ziegfeld had to pay him $3,000, when he could have had him for a third less than that sum.

That was the beginning of the Ziegfeld luck; he made a fortune, engaged Sam Kingston, a former Chicago dramatic critic, as his business manager, and went to Europe in search of novelties. He found Anna Held, a French chanteuse, brought her to America, invented the milk bath story for publicity purposes, and was once more on the high road to fortune.

Now jump to 1907; Ziegfeld had produced several doubtful French farces in partnership with William A. Brady. I remember seeing "The Turtle" under their management at the old Manhattan Theatre, on the site of the present Gimbel store, when I was a reporter on a New York newspaper. There were several others of a brand that would arouse criticism even to-day.

In 1907 began the Follies. Ziegfeld has always claimed he invented the name, and that imitators have since stolen it from him. As a matter of fact, in September, 1906, Joe Weber imported from England the London Follies, a vaudeville revue, which lasted less than one week at the old Weber and Fields Theatre, so there at least we have one precedent for the use of the word Follies as a title, before Mr. Ziegfeld produced his Follies at the old Jardin de Paris, on the roof of the New York Theatre, in June, 1907. But whether he invented it or not, he made it famous.

Pass over the intervening years; many stars were discovered by Ziegfeld; many beautiful productions were offered from year to year, and the Follies, the first real offering of this type of gorgeous girl-and-music-and-spectacle revue, became so enormously popular that he called it "A National Institution." Then the word Ziegfeld began to mean something pertaining to beautiful women with just a touch of raciness and romance to their private lives and their stage appearances.

And then came the imitators and the rivals. I think the first big opposition to the Follies was the Winter Garden, which Lee and J. J. Shubert opened in 1911, offering each year a "Passing Show." The Winter Garden offered the same type of show as the Follies, often more flamboyant, often with more beautiful women, often equalling Ziegfeld in style and taste and splendor.

Then came the Greenwich Village Follies, openly adopting the same identical name made famous by Ziegfeld. Court actions failed to prohibit their use of the name, and so Morris Green and A. L. Jones, in partnership with Joseph LeBlang (a cut rate ticket speculator) began to reap a golden harvest with their offerings each year of the Greenwich Village Follies, which they always booked in opposition to Ziegfeld wherever they could. But I think in the long run, Ziegfeld always maintained his lead over these competitors.

Then George White, a young dancing star, who had been a featured dancer with Ziegfeld, broke away from the Master and produced his own show, the

ANASTASIA REILLY

One of the most famous of the Ziegfeld Girls.

GEORGE WHITE

Brilliant young producer of the celebrated "Scandals."

Scandals, in opposition. He even went so far as to metaphorically abduct Ann Pennington, a Follies stand-by, as his principal star, and he enticed Leon Friedman, Mr. Ziegfeld's right hand man for fourteen years, to become the manager of the Scandals. And he has certainly piled up a fortune.

Then came the deluge; Sam Harris and Irving Berlin built a revue theatre which they called the Music Box, and started in to produce an annual Music Box Revue on an elaborate scale; while another producer, young Earl Carroll, announced a series of annual revues to be called Earl Carroll's Vanities. He started off with a success the first time with Peggy Hopkins Joyce at the head of his list of stars.

As for Ziegfeld himself his personality is such that he can probably win over anyone in an argument if he tries to make himself agreeable. The best description of him ever written was that of O. O. McIntyre, who was his publicity director for many years. "Vain as a peacock" was Mr. McIntyre's friendly description of the producer; a man who lived and thrived upon publicity; who could not understand why the newspapers didn't print his name on the front page every day; who was jealous of the success of others; who gloried in wearing blue suits, purple shirts, lavender ties and purple collars; with a red rose in his lapel; who lived a life of luxurious ease at his country home, with a cottage at Palm Beach in the winter; an expensive yacht in the summer; who spends thousands of dollars every year sending telegrams instead of writing letters; and who would pay Will Rogers

$3,500 a week and then find fault over the salary of a chorus girl, or the price of a gown.

I have known Mr. Ziegfeld many years and have worked with him closely part of that time, and I say these things without malice. You may read them for yourself in Mr. McIntyre's celebrated book, "White Light Nights."

As to the telegram habit, I can personally vouch for that. I have known him to tell me one thing, send me a telegram embodying the same idea from Yonkers as he rode home, repeat the same idea in a second telegram the moment he reached his country place at Hastings, and then send me a two hundred word night letter to reach me the next morning.

Here is a trifling incident which illustrates Mr. Ziegfeld's insatiable desire for publicity:

During one of the rehearsals, he tripped and partially fell over a piece of scenery, banging his knee but otherwise not seriously hurt. He picked himself up, turned toward the great empty auditorium where I was watching the rehearsal, and cried:

"Page, send out a story at once that Mr. Ziegfeld was seriously injured by an accident during the rehearsal due to falling scenery."

I sent out the paragraph and it was actually printed. One paper carried it on the first page.

But enough of Mr. Ziegfeld and his personal idiosyncrasies; the fact remains that as a producer of girl shows, he is unequalled.

EDWARD F. ALBEE

Who develops in vaudeville the stars other managers present.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Erlanger, the Syndicate and Others

No review of present theatrical conditions can ignore the developments of the past quarter of a century which put the theatre upon the firm financial basis that it enjoys to-day. The full responsibility—and credit—for virtually lifting the world of the theatre from the gutter to its present proud position as an institution, can most reasonably be bestowed upon Abraham Lincoln Erlanger, the present head of what has become known as "the syndicate" and the first man who ever put real business methods into the theatre.

Due to his integrity, his methods, and the wonderful achievements he has accomplished producing big, elaborate and costly musical productions, always clean as a whistle, he to-day enjoys the position of being probably the richest theatrical manager in America. It has been said of him that he never broke his word or his promise, and by keeping faith with everyone, producing big shows in a masterly manner, administrating great theatrical properties with integrity, he to-day enjoys the position of being virtually the leader in all things theatrical in this country.

The life of A. L. Erlanger reads like a romance; someone should preserve his biography for all time. Yet he is seldom quoted, has refused to write his

biography, dislikes to talk about himself, and is seldom seen in public. But privately he rules the greater part of the theatrical world with an iron hand from his office in the New Amsterdam Theatre, which he built twenty-two years ago.

A brief summary of his career, however, may not be out of place. Born in Cleveland, he became an usher and an assistant treasurer at the old Euclid Avenue Opera House. Later he became its treasurer and manager. He became the friend and protege of the late Mark Hanna, who managed McKinley's campaign. And when he had accumulated a respectable sum of money, he came to New York to engage in the theatrical business.

Possibly Hanna, a millionaire, encouraged him. That was before my time. All I know personally is that just when I reached New York, fresh from a Washington newspaper, eager to become a New York newspaper man, I found the theatrical world in a frenzy over the formation of what was called the theatrical syndicate. Certain legal efforts were made to dissolve it, and it so happened that as a reporter, I was assigned to report certain court proceedings. And it was then for the first time that I met A. L. Erlanger and felt the force of his dynamic personality.

Until that time, theatrical bookings had been made at random, on street corners, between managers of companies wishing to go on tour, and managers of distant theatres anxious to book touring attractions. Terms were discussed; papers were signed; but if an hour or so later, either party to the agreement could

E. L. ERLANGER

Foremost of producing managers and director of the destinies of more than one hundred theatres in the United States.

make more advantageous terms with another theatre or attraction, the first contracts were torn up ruthlessly. In every case one party to the transaction got a raw deal and a broken contract. This caused such confusion that no man's word was his bond; stars, managers and theatre owners, all lied. There was no reluctance about breaking any contract.

Mr. Erlanger, in association with several other managers, effected a solution of the problem. He first began by tying up certain theatres in various cities, under such terms that he was appointed their official booking agent in New York City, with power of attorney to act for them, and with no promise of reward except a percentage of their profits. But they had to agree to accept his bookings only, and not to deal with any other firm, except his own partners who were also producers.

Then Mr. Erlanger sent for the managers of the principal stars and attractions, and explained that they could not make bookings on the sidewalk any more; they must come to his office if they wished to play the principal theatres of the country. Furthermore, they must pay him a reasonable booking fee for the privilege of playing his theatres.

You can imagine the outcry; this was just in the period when all big manufacturing consolidations were being effected. The newspapers were full of "Trusts." But the court proceedings proved the absolute legality of his contracts, and except for a few disgruntled stars who played in halls and second class theatres for a while, he had soon established one thing; that any show booking through his exchange

received a square deal, and any theatre accepting his bookings got the best attractions and made more money year after year than if they had continued the former practice of independent and unprincipled booking with contracts that meant nothing because they could not be enforced.

That was the foundation of A. L. Erlanger's fortune; and when he commenced to produce independently, he established a record for big sumptuous musical offerings and dramatic spectacles that has stood practically unequalled ever since then. His spectacular offering of "Ben Hur" made him a fortune. His New Amsterdam Theatre became the recognized home of elaborate musical productions, and still is; and his ventures in other cities proved him a wizard of finance.

To-day Mr. Erlanger stands pre-eminent; not a big theatrical deal of any consequence anywhere in the United States is consummated without his approval. He has rivals, of course, but even his rivals consult him before taking any vital step. The biggest man in show business to-day—Abraham Lincoln Erlanger.

* * * *

Mention of the Syndicate necessarily brings in the Shuberts, who fought so strenuously against Mr. Erlanger and his activities. They are now his friends. They have a working agreement with him. They found it was better to consolidate, work in harmony, and make money, rather than to fight. But about the Shuberts—

There were three brothers in Syracuse. About the time I first became a reporter on Hearst's *New York*

JACOB J. SHUBERT

Who personally produces all of the big musical productions for his firm.

American, I was detailed to cover the efforts of the Shuberts to capture the Casino from the Sire Brothers, whose lease had expired, but who refused to vacate claiming the Aaronson estate had promised them an extension verbally. The Shuberts had meanwhile invaded New York and made a success with the Herald Square Theatre, across the street from where Macy's store stands to-day.

Only two brothers came first — Sam S. Shubert, whom everyone loved; the former treasurer of the Bastable Theatre in Syracuse. Lee Shubert, the second brother, was assistant treasurer. Jacob J. Shubert, the third brother, was still attending school. The story that the Shubert brothers once owned a haberdashery shop and sold neckties is all wrong. Ask any old timer in Syracuse, and each will all tell you that the boys began as ushers in the theatre and worked their way up.

Anyhow, Sam and Lee came to New York, leased the Herald Square Theatre with what they had saved, and were lucky enough to book David Belasco's production of "The Heart of Maryland," with Mrs. Leslie Carter, the biggest sensation of the time. And then they reached out for the Casino.

That was more years ago than I like to admit, but they still have the Casino. The courts ejected Henry B. Sire, the Shuberts moved in, and then came "Floradora." Can you imagine the rest? They began producing elaborate musical spectacles and soon made a fortune.

But as they expanded and leased theatres and fought the Syndicate, an unfortunate railroad wreck

ended the brilliant career of popular young Sammy Shubert, then not thirty years of age. Lee at once called upon his younger brother J. J. to come to New York, and it is with him, rather than with Lee, that this chapter deals henceforth. For Lee spent all of his time managing and building theatres, while J. J. began a series of big elaborate musical productions under his personal direction, which leaves him to-day as one of the outstanding producers of big girl shows in the world. His Winter Garden hits made history; his management of the Century and its elaborate musical productions have amazed everyone. A few weeks ago, sitting on the Century Roof with J. J., his youngest son, of whom he is very proud, and rightly so, came along. "Say, Pop," he said, "I went over the books with your auditor to-day and I found out he'd made a mistake; you're worth more than eleven millions, and he thought you only had about eight."

J. J. has his faults, the chief of which is his habit of losing his temper during rehearsals; but once a show is safely launched, he is a genial and hearty soul until rehearsals start for the next show.

* * * *

George White is one of our youngest producers, but no mention of the big girl and spectacle shows would be complete without including Georgie and his famous "Scandals." He is still in his early thirties, and was on the stage from the time he was twelve years old until he retired as a dancer to become a producing manager. He will frankly admit that the most of what he knows about dancing was learned

on the corners of Third Avenue, after he had sold his stock of newspapers.

Then he went into vaudeville. He was still a youngster of sixteen or thereabouts, when he teamed up with another dancer, Ben Ryan, and played vaudeville. A scout for Charles Dillingham reported favorably upon them, and in 1910 Mr. Dillingham gave them their first chance on Broadway at the Globe Theatre with Bessie McCoy in "The Echo." I happened to be business manager of the company, and it was then I first met Georgie White—a somewhat shy, very quiet, extremely likeable chap, whom everyone loved. From Mr. Dillingham he went to the Follies; he was such a hit with Ziegfeld that he remained with him five or six seasons, and finally wound up such a dancing riot with Ann Pennington that they virtually were the whole show.

Naturally a year or so later, George, having saved his salary, and with enough extra capital at his disposal, decided to produce his own revue. Everyone predicted failure, saying he had only been a hit because he was the dancing comedian of the Follies. But Georgie showed them; he even pursuaded Miss Pennington to go with him as his featured star, and his first Scandals, in 1919, proved a sensational success. Since then he has produced every year an elaborate and gorgeous girl and song show, called the Scandals. He now has three theatres under his control and the reputation of putting on one of the best revues of recent years. He no longer acts in them; he simply manages. His favorite amusement is to go into the box office and sell tickets. Probably

not half of the people who buy tickets for the Scandals know that the slender, smooth-shaven and affable young chap, is the George White whose name appears in electric letters outside. He has one other hobby; he will not write a pass even for his best friend; and he delights in making them pay real money into the box office when they come up expecting to get in for nothing with the glad hand and a happy word. His pet ambition is to have Ziegfeld walk up to the box office and pay to get in; but Ziegfeld is too wise to place himself in such a position; he always sees the Scandals, but he buys his tickets from a speculator.

EARL CARROLL

Much-talked-about producer of the "Vanities."

CHAPTER V

"A Belted Earl"

"A King may mak' a belted Earl—
A Marquis, Duke and a' that;
An honest man's the work o' God,
But goes to jail for a' that."

Robert Burns (up-to-date).

Fifteen funny—or at least odd—years ago a tall, gangling, fair-haired program boy used to puzzle the astute manager of the Alvin Theatre in Pittsburgh. Genial Johnny Reynolds has gentled many a wild youth, broken him to box-office manners, and turned him out an accomplished theatrical manager. But this boy paid more attention to the show than to the audience, and was keener to catch the musical comedy hits than casual tips. But he was always so polite when reproved, and eager to run errands—especially backstage, that Manager Reynolds had not the heart to fire him. When not whistling airs from the operas so loudly that he could not hear, the boy answered to the name of Earl Carroll—which now gleams high among the bright lights of Broadway, has made the first page of many papers—and may still get more headlines.

At the age of ten this musical program boy was self-graduated from school. At the age of sixteen he distributed his last programs and started on a tour

around the world, working his way. After eighteen months of battling wanderlust through China, India, Egypt, he heard the siren call of Broadway, and hastened back home to become a popular song writer. You may remember how Earl Carroll built the first California Bungalow on the roof of a New York skyscraper; a studio high above the noise and dust of the busy metropolis—but not too high for the light of publicity to shine upon him and advertise his songs. Here he wrote his first song hits, his "Dream of Long Ago," with music by Enrico Caruso, his first musical comedy successes, "So Long Letty," "Canary Cottage," and "Flora Bella."

Then when Andress Dippel, ex-Metropolitan opera tenor and director, turned comic-opera manager, was looking for a successor to "The Lilac Domino," Earl Carroll came forward as author of "The Love Mill," both words and music, and both clever and catchy. It was a hit in Chicago, and in Boston, after the customary run at the Colonial Theatre, finished out the season at the Boston Opera House. But Dippel could not get into New York, fell into financial difficulties, and had to mortgage "The Love Mill." The new backer put his amateur daughter into the leading soubrette rôle, and otherwise wrecked the piece so that, like "the mills of the gods," it "ground slowly and exceeding fine" for a few weeks at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre—and then went to Caine's Opera House.

This all happened back in '17, while Carroll was in the Air Service earning his wings and a Lieutenant's commission as an army aviator.

After his flying experience Earl Carroll decided to become his own producer. Scraping together all his available royalties, he produced "The Lady of the Lamp," written from his own knowledge of the mysterious East, and said by those few who saw it to have had real poetic dramatic value and the true flavor of the Orient. But they were comparatively few, and Earl was breaking.

"I Am Gambling My Last Thousand Dollars" was the startling headline to an ad that appeared in the theatrical columns of the New York newspapers, in which Earl Carroll frankly appealed to the public for help—promising to stand in the lobby after each performance and cheerfully refund the money of every patron who felt that the play was not worth the price. Many stopped to shake the daring young author by the hand—and not one asked for his money back; but they were not enough, and "The Lady of the Lamp" became a companion piece to "The Light That Failed." Also young Carroll's critical competitors chortled at his having broken precedents by appealing to the theatre-goers rather than hocking his production to the regular theatrical pawn-brokers, and going broke in the conventional manner. "He made a sucker play and got nothing," said they. "Earl Carroll is out of it."

However, among the people who stopped to shake hands with the young author was a tall, prosperous-looking, gray-haired gentleman, who said in effect if not words: "I think you are a very clever showman,

if not author, and would like to see you!" The card which the gentleman gave to Carroll read:

WILLIAM R. EDRINGTON
BANKING AND REAL ESTATE
342 Madison Ave. New York.

So, after "The Lady of the Lamp" had been effectually extinguished, having nothing in particular to do, the young ex-author-manager went around to see what Mr. Edrington meant by that peculiar remark—whether it was complimentary or not. Evidently it was, for the outcome was the formation of the Earl Carroll Realty Company, which acquired the site at Seventh Avenue and Fiftieth Street, built the Earl Carroll Theatre and office building, and launched Earl Carroll on his career as Broadway manager. By the way, do you remember the Homeric laughter that echoed up and down the Rialto when it was whispered that Earl Carroll said he was going to have a theatre? Well, there it is—and Earl Carroll productions frequently overflow into other theatres, as, for example, "White Cargo." And thereby hangs another tale of Earl Carroll's disregard of the conventions.

Leon Gordon had written a play which portrayed the marriage of a white man to an African woman. According to all the canons of the theatrical index expurgatorius this was an impossible play—despite the fact that the man made this mesalliance from the strictest moral principles, and the whole thesis of the drama was to prove how ridiculous—not to say criminal—such miscegenation is bound to be. Mr. Gordon peddled this play to all the managers, and was

only laughed at. Finally in desperation he took it to Earl Carroll—and Carroll took a chance with it.

He rented the Greenwich Village Theatre for a try-out. Before the week was out the little theatre was packed—and "White Cargo" made a fortune. Nine companies playing "Cargo" in this country and England netted Earl Carroll $12,000 a week profit —all for an investment of about $68.00 to produce it—and Damon Runyon says that he never even invested that much.

Almost as casually, although with considerably more unconscious preparation, Earl Carroll broke into the revue producing arena, which for years had been held against all comers by the spectacular Spartacus who "glorified the American girl." One of Carroll's pals was the late Jack Hughes, a theatrical agent of long experience in picking feminine pulchritude for Shubert and other big productions. Hughes remarked one day that he had on his unemployed list a whole chorus of cleverer and prettier girls than there were in the Follies. "All right, let's give them a job," said Carroll. "Let's produce a new revue."

That was the genesis of Earl Carroll's Vanities, built with child's building blocks, primarily to give employment to a lot of chorus girls out of jobs, and incidentally to fill in some open time at the Earl Carroll Theatre. Considering it only a summer show at the start, and not being minded to invest a fortune in scene-settings, gorgeous fabrics and all the glittering gew-gaws of the conventional revue, Earl Carroll built his platforms, pedestals and stairways out of large hollow cubes—colored differently on their vari-

ous sides. By simply turning these blocks during the periods when Joe Cook was performing sections of his "One Man Vaudeville Show" in 1, Earl Carroll achieved complete changes of stage settings in the cubist style. Then he engaged Peggy Hopkins Joyce to trail her ten-thousand-dollar sables down the golden stairway, allowed the minimum of costumes to the rest of the comely cast—and Earl Carroll's Vanities was the most vivacious and visible success of the current revues.

Being the possessor of an innate eye for the beautiful, Earl Carroll's selection of his chorus stamped him as one of the new authorities of glorified girlhood. Exalting the female form divine goes in Gotham, but when it came to taking "beauty unadorned—adorned the most" into the puritanical centers of "the road" it became a problem. Even smutty Pittsburgh rather shied at the Vanities show until Earl Carroll himself smiled on the stern censors of the Smoky City and convinced them of the pristine purity of his purpose—and craftily pointed to the presumption that Pittsburgh could not be as black as it is painted—because not a speck of soot ever clung to the kalsomined epidermis of his chorus. Meanwhile Vanities played to over $40,000 in one week at the Nixon Theatre, and the former Pittsburgh program-passer departed from his native city with more coin of the realm than he ever dreamed was there.

It was the same in Washington, where Congress is the common council of the District of Columbia, governing it through three District commissioners who have the power to revoke a theatre's license for

presenting an improper or licentious show. To illustrate what the District censors consider "improper or licentious" you must know that all lithographs of ladies in fleshings must have date-sheets pasted over their tights before virtuous Washingtonians are permitted to view them on billboards. But the diplomatic Mr. Carroll was early on the scene—even ahead of his advance agent—and saw to it that the District committees of the House and Senate had duly inspected and passed the Vanities as entirely within the Volstead and virtue laws.

Therefore it came as a painful surprise to the canny and careful Mr. Carroll when a callous policeman, viewing with pharisaic eye the pictorial display in front of the Music Box Theatre a year ago, swore out a warrant for the producer of The Vanities for displaying lewd and indecent pictures on the public street. Possibly this would not have occurred up in his own precinct, where presumably Carroll knows every cop on the beat and passes him into the theatre *ad libitum*. But Earl got caught off home base because he had leased his house to "Kid Boots," so was obliged to dicker with Sam H. Harris for the Music Box to open his show in. The posters which he displayed in front of the house on Forty-fifth Street have been sardonically described as "neither Nature nor Art," but they were deemed sufficient by the examining magistrate to bind Earl Carroll over for trial, on moderate bail.

Commentators differ as to whether Earl Carroll really went to jail for conscience or commerce, but the result was an astounding advertisement for the

Vanities show, which had not been doing very well up to that time. Immediately capacity audiences became the rule, and Mr. Carroll, ensconced comfortably in durance vile, was able to look over box-office statements that would have paid the amount of his bail daily, and left a comfortable profit over on matinée days. But Carroll stuck to his cell, where he made friends with everybody, jailors and prisoners alike, until at the anxious insistence of his brother Jim, who is Custodian of the Coin for his younger brother, Earl Carroll accepted bail and a jail delivery. He also emerged triumphantly from court, after a brief but conclusive trial, during which Mr. Carroll issued his classic defiance to the censors who would curb Art, incidentally pointing to the nude statues in front of the New York City Library on Fifth Avenue as glaring examples of the inconsistency of the civic code of morality.

The funny part of it is that many people—mostly among his competitors—think Earl Carroll is a clever fakir, whose defiance of the police censors, even to the unconventional extreme of going to jail—was merely a profitable publicity stunt. But I believe that Earl Carroll really believes in himself, which makes him the best possible publicity promoter. Like Anatole France's immortal Fra Giovanni his simple sincerity confounds his judges, and Satan himself could not dissuade Earl Carroll from his profound if impromptu convictions, or his firm *ex post facto* opinions.

Personally Earl Carroll is about as unlike the typical theatrical manager as one could imagine. At the

age of thirty-two, he has the broad, serene brow of the student, the pensive smile of the dreamer, the mild blue eye of the poet or musician, and the pugnacious chin of the professional pugilist. Centuries ago Brother Earl would have been a missionary, carrying the gospel of beauty and melody to beknighted heathen in far foreign lands, and probably being burned at the stake because he would not kowtow to some chief or fetish. Nowadays he finds his parish on Broadway, and is just as stubborn as of old.

As for the celebrated bathtub exploit, the less said the better. Carroll made the same mistake that the late King Edward did when, as Prince of Wales, he was summoned into the divorce court, and lied like a gentleman. Carroll said the girl didn't get into the tub; a lot of other people said she did; it doesn't appear to matter very much whether or not someone did bathe in ginger ale—the champagne story of course is preposterous—or whether she didn't; but it looks like someone was out to get Earl on a technicality, and they did. The girl is forgotten, the bathtub is forgotten, and in spite of the episode, Earl must always be figured with as a big potentiality in the Beauty Trust as one of its most active and original producers.

CHAPTER VI

The Most Eccentric Genius in the Entire Theatrical Profession

The wheels of chance of Monte Carlo offer a better opportunity to win a fortune than the theatrical game. Millions of dollars are placed on the red or the black of Broadway in the most hazardous gamble ever known in the world and yet fortunes have been won by the lucky speculators and millions swept away in the holocaust of failure.

Just as there are lucky celebrities in the ranks of the gamblers, and we hear of titled foreigners breaking the bank at Monte Carlo, so from the world of Broadway emerge several gigantic figures who have been tapped on the shoulder by Dame Fortune at some time with the words, "You win."

Some of those who won fortunes in producing plays kept the money; others placed their winnings immediately on the wheel of fate to watch the little ball go spinning again, and of those—nearly all lost.

Most of the big theatrical producers of the past died broke. They kept speculating until they had lost everything. Charles Frohman left an estate of less than $10,000 when he died, but the sudden development of motion pictures brought to his heirs a tremendous sum when the motion picture rights of his various plays were sold.

MORRIS GEST

One of the world's greatest showmen and most artistic of producers in America.

Edward E. Rice, one of the richest producers of a generation ago, died the other day, broke, and friends and relatives had to bury him. Augustin Daly, one of the greatest producers of his time, left nothing. Henry Abbey and A. M. Palmer, big managers of the past, went into bankruptcy before they died.

There is to-day on the Broadway that I know a manager who is often referred to, confidentially, as the P. T. Barnum of his time. He has produced the biggest and most expensive productions ever known in this generation or at any time in the history of the world. He is the most eccentric genius among the producers. He has spent millions, made millions, and lost millions. What he actually has to-day no one knows. Of course he has tremendous large sums invested in scenery and rights to plays and some day he hopes to win back enough money to pay for the cost of those productions. But usually he will tell you frankly, he is "broke."

Morris Gest is the most unique genius probably in the theatrical world in this generation. He has had a romantic story that is worth while telling. He was born in Russia, the son of a manufacturer of soaps and perfumes. At the age of nine, Morris was shipped to Boston on a visit to relatives. There he sold newspapers, became property boy at a theatre, studied law at night school, entered the office of a prominent lawyer as a clerk and later drifted into theatricals. To tell in detail all his early struggles would be to fill too much space. Suffice to say that in 1901 he showed up at the Buffalo Exposition as

assistant to Fred Thompson, the genius who afterward built the Hippodrome in New York. Thompson had a number of concessions. The early showmanship of Gest was evidenced the day after the assassination of McKinley. The crime, as everyone knows, was committed by a crazy anarchist named Czólgosz. Gest was running a side show where patrons threw three balls trying to hit the head of a negro and the winner got a cigar.

Gest immediately engaged a white man, made him up looking like an anarchist, had him stick his head in the opening in the canvas and put out a big banner with the sign, "Hit Czolgosz on the head and get a cigar." The feeling was so intense against the anarchist that great crowds flocked to the side show and Gest did a wonderful business for more than two hours, raking in the nickels until Federal detectives told him to stop it for fear of a possible riot.

I have been intimately associated in business and theatrical matters with Morris Gest for many years, so perhaps it would be better if I confine my future observations to what I know personally. When I first met Morris Gest, he had just bought the concessions at the Hippodrome in New York, where I was employed as publicity manager. It was at this time that Gest expanded and formed a partnership with a young chap named F. Ray Comstock, who had been treasurer of the Criterion Theatre. This was the beginning of the firm name of F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest, which has since been identified with more than one hundred productions and some of the most famous stars of America and

Europe. Comstock is a quiet, alert man and seldom speaks. Gest is an enthusiastic whirlwind on any subject in which he becomes interested. Their characters may easily be surmised when I mention their nicknames. Comstock is spoken of as Gloomy Gus, while Gest is always referred to by his associates as "the wild man."

Gest is not only a dreamer but a man with a wonderful vision not only as to what will interest the public, but also what will interest the newspapers. He thrives on publicity. He will not touch an enterprise unless he believes the newspapers will become so interested that they will in turn transmit that interest to the public. He has the happy faculty of always seeking something new. The world loves novelty; he must give it something to talk about. There is only one thing worse than being talked about, as Oscar Wilde said, and that is not being talked about. This is the creed of Morris Gest and the mainspring of his endeavors.

Gest sincerely and frankly does not produce things for the sole purpose of making money. His whole record shows that all he wants to do is to pay expenses and then invest his proceeds in some other wild and unusual scheme whereby he risks all of his gains—and usually loses. Working with Morris Gest in the business management of his various enterprises, I have seen him do the wildest and most unheard-of things and get away with it, usually landing on the front page.

We once took a dozen beautiful girls from the "Experience" company to Billy Sunday's revival in

Paterson and had them all hit the sawdust trail with the reporters following. One of the girls really got religion and abandoned the stage for fear of possible temptation. Even though he lost an actress by the venture, Gest obtained tremendous publicity for "Experience."

I once knew him to open the box office for the advance sale of a theatre at five o'clock in the morning, announcing the fact in big ads the night before so that the patrons would be led to believe that if they did not get there by that unheard-of hour they would never get seats.

A remarkable theatrical venture of Gest's early career was the starring tour of three famous ladies—Lady Constance Stewart Richardson, who was a barefoot society dancer; Gertrude Hoffman, the remarkable dancer who first did "Salome" under Gest's direction; and Madame Polaire, the French actress, whom Gest billed for the first time as the "ugliest actress in the world" because of her remarkable personality.

Gest employed three distinct press agents for this show. Each claimed that the star he represented was the real star of the show and Gest deliberately raised animosity among the three ladies so that they were constantly fighting, demanding their rights, threatening to resign and making him pull his hair in despair at their demands. All these exciting incidents merely led to more newspaper space and had the public talking about the three stars more than ever.

In "The Wanderer" we had a flock of sixty sheep, and when we played in Boston, we secured an official permit from the Mayor to turn the sheep loose on Boston Common, creating tremendous indignation among those who loved the park. That same Boston Common was the arena for another exploit of Gest's imagination several years later. We were presenting "Mecca," a big oriental extravaganza, in which one of the big scenes was a slave market with men sold at auction. Gest secured a local philanthropist who ran a mission to help the poor men in the tenement district, and he had this man bring fifty destitute men to Boston Common and auction them off to anyone who would give them a position. Once more front page publicity, and then somebody discovered the whole thing was a scheme to advertise "Mecca."

I hope to convince everyone that in all efforts for publicity, we actually did do the things announced.

Soon after Gest formed his partnership with Comstock he began the business of producing plays. It was at this time that he met and married Reina Belasco, the daughter of David Belasco. His meeting with his future wife was romantic. Mr. Belasco had just produced a new play at the theatre which he then occupied on 42nd Street, and following his usual custom he gathered a number of friends and invited them all to have supper with him in Child's restaurant. Mr. Belasco patronized a cheaper restaurant, not from motives of economy, but because he likes butter cakes, and nearly every night after a premiere he entertained his friends in a Child's restaurant.

On this particular night, his daughter made the discovery that there were thirteen at the table. At this moment, Gest, young and unobtrusive, and unacquainted with the Belascos, came into the restaurant. Mr. Belasco's manager, Ben Roeder, knew him well. He called Gest over, introduced him to everyone including his future wife and said, "Now we have fourteen at the table."

A year later Gest and Mr. Belasco's daughter were married. The future producer overcame the parental objections to the daughter of the great producer marrying a young Russian lad without a nickel. Mr. Belasco was so impressed with the fiery enthusiasm and ardent wooing of Gest that he finally gave his consent.

I do not think the world in general heard much of Morris Gest until he produced "Experience." Prior to that time, of course, he had made nearly twenty trips to Europe as the personal representative of the late Oscar Hammerstein, who at one time employed him to secure vaudeville acts from Europe and later to engage operatic talent for Hammerstein's grand opera venture. In the days when he secured vaudeville talent, Gest again showed his genius for inventing new things. He imported Abdul Kader and his three wives, all supposed to be from Constantinople where Abdul Kader was said to be the court painter to the Sultan of Turkey.

Naturally, with three wives, he could not get by the immigration authorities, so the whole bunch was sent to Ellis Island for examination. Once more front page publicity and tremendous advertising.

Photo by Harold Stein

DAVID BELASCO

(*Arriving at Waterloo Station, London*)

(*l. to r.*) *Will A. Page, David Belasco, Gilbert Miller and Morris Gest.*
(*Back row, l. to r.*) *Ernest Gros, Elmer Tafflinger and Thomas A. Curry.*

Finally, by putting up a bond, they were admitted as artists. Abdul Kader and his three wives in oriental costume were put out of five or six hotels with reporters following them all of the time, and finally opened at Hammerstein's, where for six months they packed the theatre; the great painter painting and his three wives singing and dancing. Gest told me later that Abdul Kader was a Swiss whom he found in Geneva, and the three wives were his real wife, his daughter and his wife's sister.

The early exploits of Gest in the vaudeville world, however, fade into the background when one considers his career in the past ten years which have brought him so prominently forward as a big international producer. He made half a million dollars with "Experience," a morality play. He put more than half of it into the production of "The Wanderer," in which Florence Reed scored her first big smashing hit in New York. "The Wanderer" never made a nickel, but Gest had enough money left to buy the American rights to "Chu Chin Chow," the biggest hit of London, which he imported at a cost of $350,000.

His daring in bringing the scenery and costumes from London to New York in wartime was never better illustrated than when one considers that, owing to the submarines he could obtain no insurance.

"Chu Chin Chow" won back its cost of production and made $300,000 more, which Gest immediately invested in a costly venture called "Aphrodite," a staging of the famous romance of Alexandria, in which Dorothy Dalton, the famous screen star,

vamped the young poet and made him commit three crimes for which she later paid the penalty. Her expiation showed the beautiful Dorothy wearing nothing but a string of pearls, and a comb in her hair leaping into the sea. It was in this famous production that Dazie, the dancer, was engaged at an enormous salary to play a very small but effective part—that of a girl slave who is crucified in full view of the audience.

I shall never forget the night of the first performance. The venture represented a total cost of one half million dollars at the big Century Theatre in New York. There was a near panic in the second act when some rubbish in the balcony caught fire, but the beautiful performance of Dorothy Dalton quelled the disturbance.

The production proved a sensation. Gest was so nervous that he insisted upon staying up all night to read the decisions of the critics. We drove down to Park Row at one in the morning and waited for three hours, getting one paper after another. All of the notices were sensational, but in the *American* we could not find a line. This paper, one of the most influential in New York, had sent its dramatic critic, Alan Dale, but we scanned the dramatic page in vain looking for his criticism. Finally Gest laid the paper down in disgust and we decided to go home.

It was then five o'clock in the morning, and as we started to leave the restaurant where we had had supper, I saw on page one of the paper—the front page, where of course we never dreamed of looking—in great headlines, a five column streamer, "Aphrodite

An Offense to Public Decency." Then followed a terrific roast. Gest fairly danced with joy as he read the notice which, after describing it as a fantastic and gorgeous orgy, called upon the Mayor to close the show.

"The line will begin forming at the box office tomorrow morning," said Mr. Gest calmly, as we rode up town. His prediction was true. "Aphrodite" sold out for the season. The Mayor paid little attention to the notice and at the request of the police, a few scenes were changed, but the crowd came, and Mr. Gest won back his half million dollars and more besides. In Cleveland alone when "Aphrodite" played there the gross receipts for one week were $98,000.

But what a fall the next season. "Mecca," costing $300,000, written by the author of "Chu Chin Chow" was an absolute and ghastly failure. At the same time, Gest imported an English spectacle called "Afgar" with beautiful Alice Delysia as the star. It cost $191,000, and this, on top of all his other losses and with other plays, had Gest on the verge of bankruptcy. Two years later, in January, 1922, I was with Gest when he said, "I owe $460,000 and I don't know whether to jump in the river or go into bankruptcy." A messenger brought in a cable. It was from Nikita Balieff, the famous Russian comedian, the star of the "Chauve Souris," who had made a tremendous success in Paris and London.

He would come to America, said the cable, under the management of his countryman, Morris Gest, if Mr. Gest would be so kind as to cable him immediately

$10,000 in advance and $5,000 for the steamship fares. Mr. Gest laughed. "Where am I going to get $15,000," he said. "The man is a genius, a wonder, and will be a sensation, but my credit is exhausted." However, he did finally raise $15,000 for one final gamble which he said would be his last turn of the wheel if luck went against him.

The rest is history. Balieff came, was seen and conquered. He played for sixteen months in New York City to tremendous receipts with $5 as the top price, and Gest was paying off his debts at such a rapid rate that his creditors were amazed. Then followed in rapid succession, the importation of Stanislawsky and the Moscow Art Theatre, a daring enterprize, whereby he was risking $200,000 again on the turn of the wheel, but the Moscow Art Theatre won back for him more than $250,000.

He engaged Duse, the great Italian actress who had turned down offers from nearly every manager in New York. Mr. Gest called on her in Italy and secured her signature to a contract. He made $140,000 on twenty performances only. The death of Duse in Pittsburgh was a tragic ending to this remarkable association.

The culminating climax of Gest's career and one which he can never hope to equal was the production of "The Miracle." For this he brought over a remarkable array of European artists. Max Reinhardt, Germany's famous director, came to America to supervise this colossal offering. Lady Diana Manners, daughter of the 8th Duke of Rutland, and one of the most prominent women of English society,

who had acted in private theatricals, but had never made a professional appearance, was engaged to come to America to play the role of the Madonna, and to alternate with Princess Matchabelli, an Italian actress, who was engaged to play the Madonna.

Once again, Gest had two noble ladies quarreling. There was an alleged row between the Princess and Lady Diana for the privilege of opening at the first performance. Princess Matchabelli withdrew after sixteen performances and sued Gest for one million dollars damages to her sacred reputation. So far she has not been able to get her case into court.

"The Miracle" cost $600,000 in real money. I know, because I saw the statements. No such sum was ever before in the history of the world expended upon any theatrical production. There seemed no chance to ever get it back. A large part of this sum was donated voluntarily in the cause of art by Otto Kahn, the philanthropical New York banker who is interested in the best there is in the world of music, art, and literature. Of Mr. Kahn's connection with "The Miracle" I shall have more to say in a later chapter.

I consider Morris Gest the greatest gambler ever known in the world of the theatre. He is certainly the most picturesque figure on Broadway to-day. His famous black velour hat always heralds his coming. I do not believe anyone on Broadway wears quite that kind of a hat, and there is a good story to tell about that later.

In the fifteen years I have known Morris Gest, I have traveled with him from San Francisco and Los

Angeles to practically every city in this country and in Europe. He is as well known to the traffic policemen on Market Street, in San Francisco, as he is to the agent of Cook's Tours in the Place de'l Opera in Paris. Every waiter at the Savoy Hotel in London and at the Ritz-Carlton in New York knows him intimately.

Mr. Gest is so well known that on one occasion, when I was crossing the English Channel with him the purser of the steamer gave us the only remaining stateroom on the boat and when the King of Sweden came along a few minutes later, the poor old King had to stand outside on the deck as there were no accommodations for him. The purser knew the King was coming, but gave Mr. Gest the room reserved for His Majesty. In this case a pound note prevailed over royal privilege.

Mr. Gest is to-day forty-two years old. A dynamo of energy and almost a nervous wreck. Apparently he never sleeps. His favorite resort nearly every night is a little Russian restaurant where artists and singers and Russian exiles gather nightly in New York. A Russian princess waits on the table and a Russian grand duke runs the restaurant. Mr. Gest sits there until closing time, usually until three or four in the morning, as he finds it impossible to sleep more than a few hours. He is always at his office in the Princess Theatre the next day by eleven o'clock.

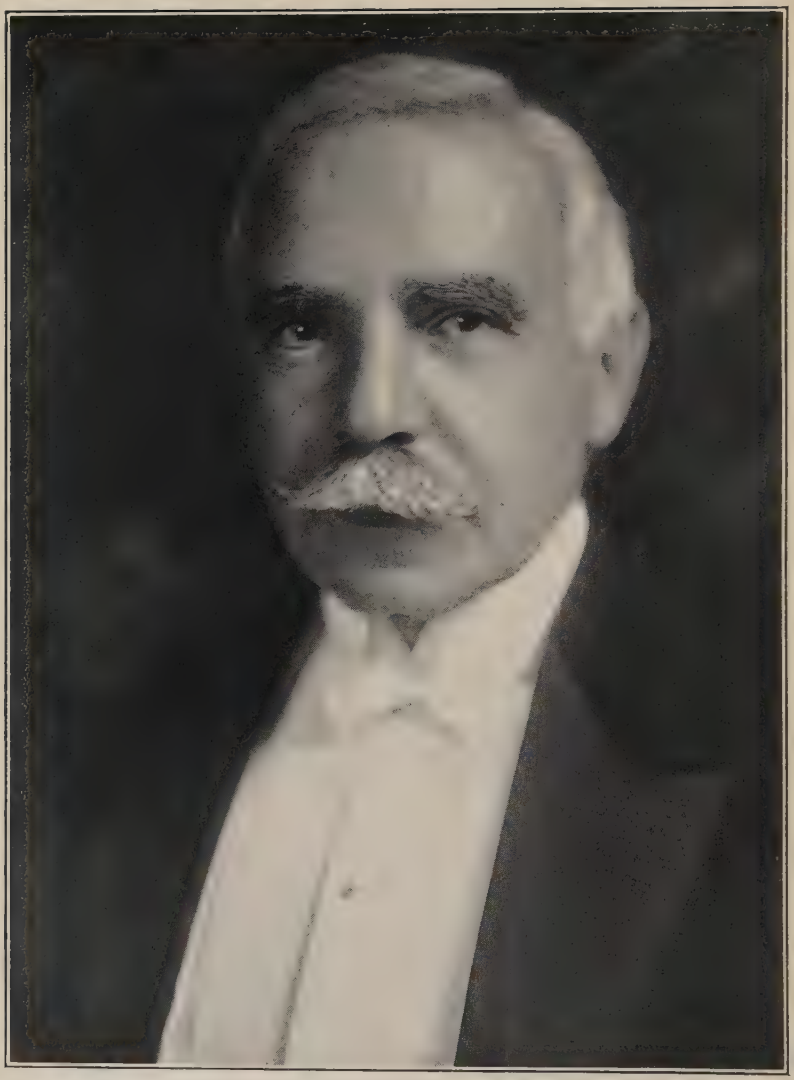
He is one of the most generous of men. Even though he may not have money himself, he will go out and borrow it to take care of anyone in distress.

He appears happiest when his productions are losing money. Then, with forced gayety, he seeks the company of others and he is a jolly good fellow. But the moment success overtakes him and he produces something which causes the critics to hail him as a modern marvel, his attitude changes and he becomes the quietest and the most distant of men even to those who have been his closest friends. He probably feels like a Napoleon who has scored a great victory and who prefers to keep the mob at a distance so they may adore him reverently and gaze at him in awe. I say this not with malice, but merely that it is a queer phase of his character.

The day before "The Miracle" was produced with the enormous risk involved, Gest had a nervous breakdown in his office. He was trembling, and shaking, and collapsed upon his desk. He said he was ruined, not financially, for he had faced that many times before, but that his reputation as a producer was at stake and "The Miracle" would be ridiculed because of lack of appreciation. I tried to cheer him up, but he would not let me. I telephoned Mrs. Gest that he was unable to leave his office, so she sent dinner to him there. I remained with him for twenty-four hours without sleep. He could scarcely eat when the dinner came, however, but he knew it was necessary for him to face the ordeal of the first performance, so he recovered his strength. I went with him to the charming home he occupies on East Fifty-second Street, where his valet shaved him and dressed him. Then we went to the theatre and in a few short hours he stood on the stage of the

transformed Century Theatre arm in arm with Max Reinhardt, the famous producer, receiving the cheers and applause of a tremendous audience. After the show he was a guest of honor at a supper given him by Otto Kahn and everyone showered him with adulation and praise.

There you have in a few words an intimate real life story of one of the most remarkable and unique geniuses ever known in the amusement world of New York.



OTTO H. KAHN

Prominent banker, the most generous patron of the art of the theatre the stage has ever known.

CHAPTER VII

Otto Kahn and the Miracle

In any book purporting to chronicle the important events of the theatre of recent years, a special chapter should be devoted to the crowning achievement of the American stage, the production of "The Miracle," the most gorgeous, imposing and stupendous offering ever shown on an American stage, or any other stage in the world.

Such a chronicle, necessarily, would deal first of all with Morris Gest, who produced it; and Otto Kahn, whose financial aid made it possible.

Mr. Kahn is one of the unique figures in the Bohemian and social life of New York. The head of a great international banking firm, his whole life has been devoted to fostering enterprises in which Art with a capital A, shall coincide with Enterprise and with Worthy Endeavor. The story of his private philanthropies has no place in this volume; but his praiseworthy efforts to encourage the best in theatrical art deserve to be recorded, even though he modestly and sincerely asked me to keep him as much as possible in the background in discussing the greatest theatrical production ever known in the history of the American stage—the production of "The Miracle"—which could never have been possible except for his sincere and most enthusiastic support.

Morris Gest, who produced it, with the assistance of Max Reinhardt, received the applause and justly so; yet in the background, his name never mentioned, was Otto Kahn.

Mr. Kahn, I should explain for those who are not familiar with their theatre, is the genial, affable, courteous and popular leader of the little group of artistic-loving rich men who endowed the Metropolitan Opera House and have put the world of grand opera on its financial and social feet in New York City. Mr. Kahn has also been prominently identified with various artistic enterprises, theatrical, musical, and social, which needed a little help from a monetary standpoint. To his credit, be it said, he has never invested a nickel in any enterprise which savored of the commercial. He has never made a dollar out of any enterprise which he helped; and if any such enterprise ever did make a dollar of profit, he would be the first to donate it to some worthy charity. He is, if I may be pardoned the apparent grandiloquency of the phrase, the most generous patron of the theatrical world the stage has ever known.

And so it came to pass that after he had fostered many minor enterprises, aided with his funds many worthy minor theatre projects, and extended anonymous aid to many ambitious young American singers who aspired to grand opera, the time came when Mr. Kahn and Morris Gest discussed the project of presenting "The Miracle" in New York.

"The Miracle," originally conceived and staged by Max Reinhardt, was—and is—the story of a rebellious Nun who longs for the excitement of a life of

pleasure in the world from which she has been exiled by her vows; and who, finding the opportunity, flees (in a dream) into the haunts of pleasure; while the Madonna, a statue, comes to life to take her place during the seven years of her wanderings and to ultimately resume her posture when the repentant nun returns, seeking forgiveness for her transgressions.

To present "The Miracle," it was necessary for Mr. Gest to transform the beautiful Century Theatre into a replica of a cathedral; the stage was torn out, a great altar was erected, an organ was built into the upper boxes, the auditorium itself was absolutely transformed. The orchestra seats became the pews of a church. More than 500 people were employed in the extraordinary production.

No such production was ever made in New York; no such production has ever been known in the history of the theatre anywhere; and no such production probably will be known in the next century of the drama in New York. And back of it all was the wonderful aid and assistance of Otto Kahn, who advanced to Mr. Gest whatever money was required. I have heard various stories as to the exact sums: I happened to be with Mr. Gest at the time, as I have already stated, and Mr. Gest told me the production cost almost $600,000. Of this, so I am reliably informed, $400,000 was advanced by Mr. Kahn merely on Mr. Gest's personal notes. Mr. Kahn, with his characteristic generosity, inserted no date of maturity. The notes were merely memoranda as to the amounts advanced, and the contract which I understand was signed, provided that if the produc-

tion proved a success, the sums advanced should be returned to Mr. Kahn; if the production failed, Mr. Kahn was willing to regard the notes merely as scraps of paper and tear them up.

There have been so many articles about "The Miracle," legendary in character, as to Mr. Kahn's exact relation to "The Miracle," that I ventured to ask the financier recently just how much of it was all true. It seemed incredible that Otto Kahn, or anyone, should be willing to risk the loss of such a colossal sum merely for the sake of sponsoring an artistic enterprise, with no hope of profit, and perhaps little chance of ever getting his investment back. But Mr. Kahn settled the matter in a few words.

"Mr. Gest is a genius, a dreamer, a man who cares nothing for money if he can accomplish artistic results," he said. "Many exaggerated reports have been printed as to the extent to which I backed 'The Miracle'; I can only say that I did it because of my faith in Morris Gest, and that faith and my own faith in 'The Miracle' has been justified in the results since then. While 'The Miracle' has not yet won back every cent of its cost of production, its success since that memorable night at the Century has been such as to prove to me that I was not mistaken in the play, nor in the man. I shall always remember my connection with this glorious enterprise as one of the most notable events in my career, in which I have always endeavored to advance an artistic enterprise worthy of support."

Mr. Kahn also gave me a copy of the letter from Max Reinhardt, written by the great German direc-

tor before he returned home, after directing "The Miracle":

DEAR MR. KAHN:

In taking leave from America, I want to send you these few lines to express my gratitude and high esteem.

It was you in the first instance who made it possible for "The Miracle" to be presented to the American public. I well recall our meeting in your house in London in the spring of 1914, when you first offered to arrange that this production should be brought to New York. And I need not say how gratified I was when in the autumn of 1922 you renewed that offer. It was you who first impressed upon me the unique qualifications of Mr. Morris Gest, to whose devotion, enthusiasm, resourcefulness, skill, and dynamic personality so large a part of the success of "The Miracle" is due. It was you who broached the subject to Mr. Gest and brought him and myself into contact.

If it had not been for your artistic understanding, your sympathetic and discriminating advice and your generous financial support, the achievement of presenting "The Miracle," such as it is presented at the Century Theatre, to the New York public, would not have been possible.

I know how sincere, unceasing and enlightened is your interest in, and support of, art, and how valuable and important is the furtherance which you thus give to spiritual things in your great country which, besides its preponderating material and economic might, is more and more taking its place as one of the greatest —if not the greatest—artistic and cultural centres of the world.

I am carrying away a vast impression of the greatness of the New York of to-day. The promise of the New York of to-morrow baffles the imagination. It is evident that many people in many walks of life are doing their share towards realizing that promise. As an artist and from my personal observation, I can only speak of what, in that respect, you are doing in the field of art and I wish to be permitted to express my congratulations to you and to the City of New York on your constant and enlightened activities for the cause of art in America.

Yours faithfully,

MAX REINHARDT.

"The Miracle" has since made theatrical history. It proved a gigantic success at the Century Theatre; it was presented in various other cities under the sponsorship of civic authorities; it is still playing. I believe it will be playing in big cities of the United States ten years from now. Even the smallest communities should see it. And when it was given in Boston, Otto Kahn personally made a speech from the stage of the Boston Opera House—in the city where Morris Gest landed as an immigrant boy, penniless, and later sold newspapers—in which Mr. Kahn paid this tribute to the American producer of "The Miracle":

"The first task and duty of those interested in the cause of art in America is, of course, to foster and support American artists and American artistic aspirations, endeavors and undertakings.

"But, while genuine art is national in its roots, in what it aims to express and in the character of its expression, still the art manifestations of the leading peoples of the world have at all times reacted upon and stimulated and influenced one another. To bring the best of European achievements in dramatic art before the eyes of the public and the artists of America is to render a valuable service to American art, just as it is a service to bring to this country the greatest of European singers and virtuosi, and exhibitions of the works of the best painters.

"When I first saw 'The Miracle' in London twelve years ago, I made up my mind that this lovely, moving and unique spectacle should be seen in America. I spoke to Max Reinhardt and he agreed. The war broke out in the summer of 1914, and, of course, the idea of bringing 'The Miracle' to America was abandoned.

"It is fortunate that the idea was not carried into effect prior to the war, for in that case we should have had here merely a repetition of the London performance. 'The Miracle' of to-day

is far superior to that. Professor Reinhardt has enhanced and elaborated it, and above all, there has been added to it the genius of two Americans, Morris Gest in the first place and Norman-Bel Geddes in the second place. Also, there has been added to it, through the choice of Morris Gest, the most perfect impersonation imaginable of the role of the 'Madonna.' It was he who thought of Lady Diana Cooper for the part. She had no idea of playing it, she did not wish to play it, and I believe nothing but the dynamic personality of Morris Gest could have induced her to come to America to play it.

"The performance of 'The Miracle' is a triumph for everybody concerned, and gratitude and commendation are due to everybody participating in that production, from the leaders in its conception and execution down to the most modest of the stage helpers. But it is in an especial sense a triumph for Morris Gest, who many years ago, in utter poverty, without friends and without advantages, a stranger in the land, set out from Boston on the steep and stony and uncharted road before him, leading he knew not whither, and who now comes before you to present to you the master achievement of his career.

"He is a striking example of the boundless opportunity which America in every field of endeavor, now as much as ever, offers to talent, character, perseverance, ambition, faith, and high aspirations.

"If I am asked to particularize about the man, who came here the humblest of youthful immigrants and who has returned to you, holding a conspicuous and honored place in the very front rank of his profession and whom you have welcomed back with characteristic American generosity, I would say, summarizing in three paragraphs:

"Morris Gest, apart from being a human dynamo, a practical dreamer, a genius as a 'showman,' kind, generous, and trustworthy as a man, is essentially an idealist. He is utterly contemptuous of money. It has no meaning, purpose, attraction or use for him, except as a means for indulging in artistic adventures. He does not want to keep it, and does not know how to keep it, for his own use.

"He has genuine reverence for beauty and art, and an almost religious zeal in regarding himself a missionary in their service. His ambition is to do things which are unusual, difficult and hazardous, and at the same time of rare artistic eminence and merit.

"He is deeply and proudly patriotic American, devoted to his adopted country, grateful for the opportunity and recognition America has given him, and as thoroughly and militantly imbued with her spirit as if his ancestors had lived here for generations.

"I am greatly impressed with the setting of 'The Miracle' in your admirable Opera House which lends itself perfectly to this splendid spectacle. And I am much gratified to be assured that the judgment of this great and cultured city, the cradle indeed of American culture, and of the elite audience assembled here this evening, endorses the judgment of New York, Cleveland and Cincinnati, in its enthusiastic reception and its responsiveness to the appeal of 'The Miracle'."

Since then "The Miracle" has been the biggest sensation in the theatrical world. Mr. Gest has recovered his fortunes with this remarkable achievement; he has almost ruined his health through worry and constant endeavor; but it is a pleasure to record that when I last saw him, he had entirely forgotten the enormous financial handicap under which he suffered when Otto Kahn turned the tide of fortune for him. The latest rumor is that Mr. Kahn will build him a magnificent theatre in New York as a tribute to his accomplishment in putting over "The Miracle" and making it the crowning financial and artistic achievement of this generation.

If the theatre is ever built—and I understand it will be built—it should perpetuate for all time, the name, The Miracle Theatre.

ANN PENNINGTON

One of the most fascinating decorations of the musical comedy theatre of to-day.

CHAPTER VIII

Behind the Scenes

The world away from Broadway, unfamiliar with the inside workings of the Billion Dollar Beauty Trust, and knowing little of stage life except what it reads in the newspapers published in small towns, in the form of gossip from Broadway, scarcely comprehends the quiet tranquillity which really exists along the Rialto where thousands of men and women, engaged in the theatrical business, are calmly earning their bread and butter in their daily work which to them is just as much a routine of existence as is that of a shopgirl, factory hand, or the worker in any other line of endeavor in any other city throughout the United States.

The majority of the workers in the theatrical world are serious-minded people whose only thought is to do the work assigned to them the best they know how; yet such is the maze of misunderstanding throughout the world that no matter how insignificant may be a member of the profession who becomes involved in even a breath of scandal, the facts in the case are distorted and exaggerated and telegraphed to the farthest ends of the world, giving out therefore an impression which ninety times out of a hundred is wrong. While there are and have been and always will be indiscretions in the world of the theatre which

make scandalous headlines, the same can be said of any other field of activity.

There are, of course, exceptions—glaring exceptions. And the world of the theatre unfortunately is judged by these exceptions. There are on the other hand notable cases of great and good work done by theatrical stars and managers—and not a line of it ever appears in the newspapers.

Perhaps this is because the public is always keenly interested in anything pertaining to scandal. This explains perhaps why a young twenty-one-year-old girl from Louisville, Kentucky, named Imogene Wilson could command almost as much newspaper space over a trifling incident as Calvin Coolidge secured for his presidential campaign. This explains also perhaps why anything pertaining to a show girl is put on the front page and given much more space than is devoted to such a star as Fred Stone and his beautiful daughter Dorothy, leaders of the profession, maintaining in their company a discipline requiring correct conduct on the part of every member of the organization.

The chorus girls are not as bad as they are painted —and they use a lot of make-up at that. There are many gold diggers in the big musical shows just as there are gold diggers in other musical companies, gold diggers among the shopgirls, gold diggers among the fascinating stenographers of Wall Street, gold diggers everywhere. As one of the players in David Belasco's production of "The Gold Diggers" so aptly said:

"My boy, all women are gold diggers; they begin to gold dig their parents for boxes of candy when they are children; they gold dig their childhood sweethearts for theatre tickets; they gold dig their fathers and mothers for nice clothes and other comforts, and then they gold dig their husbands—my God! how they gold dig their husbands."

Therefore, do not be too hard upon the gold digger. I must admit that in the course of my experience with the favorite and lovely maids of various musical shows, I met the true artists in that particular line of endeavor. If we had a high school for gold diggers, I believe each and every one of these girls would be entitled to the degree of "Doctor of Gold Digging." I would have said "Bachelor" only they find bachelors far more difficult to gold dig than nice elderly sugar daddies.

Someone once said that "the foolish girl, meeting a new admirer, asks for something in particular and probably gets it which is about all she will ever get in return for asking. The wise chorus girl asks for nothing and gets all the guy has."

Not that they are all confessed gold diggers; there are some little girls whose mothers come and take them home every night, but they are probably the dangerous ones without knowing it, for they incite a misleading idea among the thousands of men who patronize musical shows. Here, in the midst of iniquity, as these men believe, there seems innocence on display, and sometimes it is true. The average stage door John getting along in years believes in meeting them while they are young and inexperienced. That

is why you read so often in the newspapers of the elopement and midnight marriage of some young chorus girl who is perhaps sixteen or seventeen years of age; whereas the more experienced girls, who have attained wisdom at the age of twenty-one, do not wish to get married. They prefer to have, not one husband in a Harlem flat, but a dozen admirers who will invite them to Palm Beach and compete for the privilege of entertaining them in a private car or on a steam yacht.

Yet the little innocents often get the big dough —if any is to be had—for occasionally a young girl will elope to Greenwich, have a brief honeymoon with the scion of a wealthy family who has escaped temporarily from Yale, and then the family perhaps will come across with a check for $100,000 to soothe the wounded feelings of the little darling and her mother.

They always have mothers—these girls. If they have not a real mother in New York, they will club together and hire one, using her services as subsequent events may make necessary. Miss A—— perhaps will find it convenient to have her mother come on from Chicago and live in the flat when the attentions of Mr. X—— become a trifle too strenuous; just when Mr. X—— has been shown his proper place, there may be a telephone call from Miss B—— to the effect that Mr. Y—— is anxious to have her go with him to Greenwich, Connecticut to visit a minister. Thereupon, the hired mother will be promptly shipped off to the apartment of Miss B——, announcing that she has just come in from the old home in Cohoes.

She will restore harmony in this apartment until Mr. Y—— learns to love and respect the dear old mother who has come from up-state.

I even knew one case of a hired "mother" who carried realism to such an extent in impersonating a part that when responding to a hurry-up telephone call, she stopped at the delicatessen and bought six jars of grape jelly, carefully washed off the labels and then carried the package into the home of her supposed daughter, where the admirer was waiting, saying that she had brought down "some home-made jelly from the old farm." All of this naturally greatly impressed the sugar daddy who happened to be calling and he was convinced that "mother" was real.

The real stage mothers—there are a few of them of course—call for their darling daughters at the stage door and carefully escort them home night after night. These girls, who are so young that they have real mothers call for them, are the prize cherubs of the musical shows, reared like hot-house babies, carefully nurtured, and given the most prominent positions.

There are, of course, other types of chorus girls. But every word that I am writing here applies to any of the beautiful girl shows which I characterize generally as Broadway's Billion Dollar Beauty Trust. I have been associated with many of these big musical shows and I have found that practically the same type of show girl gravitates from one attraction to another with a single exception that perhaps you find some girls have a larger number of admirers

because they have been so extensively advertised and this makes it easier for them to qualify for the degree of "Doctor of Gold Digging."

Sometimes, however, it is a disadvantage to a musical comedy to have girls who become too experienced in the art of gold digging. I can remember a year ago when two of the most beautiful girls of the Follies who had worked hard and faithfully throughout a trying summer, a dark and dismal Fall, finally in January reached the winter of their discontent and applied to Mr. Ziegfeld for a vacation. All of their wealthy admirers, they explained, had gone to Palm Beach and they had various invitations to social functions which they would like to accept if they could get a leave of absence. Mr. Ziegfeld, always the soul of generosity, granted them two weeks vacation with full salary and said:

"Run along to Palm Beach and have a good time. You will be a great advertisement for the Ziegfeld Follies, for everyone will want to know who you are. When the gang returns to Broadway you will have hundreds of new admirers who will come to see the show. God bless you, children."

The kind Mr. Ziegfeld, therefore, permitted Helen Lee Worthing, one of the most famous beauties of recent years, and her intimate pal and confidante Phoebe Lee to depart for southern climes and the social activities of Palm Beach in the height of the January season. The advent of two such beautiful girls—Miss Worthing, a delicate blonde, and Miss Lee, an exotic type of red-haired femininity—created nothing less than a sensation at the aristocratic Royal

Poinciana Hotel. Social dowagers, who saw them on the sands, glowered with anger as they saw all of the eligible young men—and many of the elderly rich men—flock around the two pretty girls. With ingenuity born only of devilish minds, the two girls had contracted to attract attention by a weird contrast; Miss Worthing wore a smart bathing suit of red silk, while Miss Lee wore a home-made bathing suit of calico somewhat resembling blue rompers. The moving picture men, newspaper photographers, all of the employees of the hotel and four-fifths of the crowd on the sands paid no attention to anyone else except to the beautiful Helen Lee Worthing and the lovely Phoebe Lee.

What was the result? Ziegfeld lost them both. They never went back to the Follies. Miss Worthing met a millionaire to whom she became engaged immediately and returned to New York, became a motion picture star because of the publicity she had acquired at Palm Beach and expects in a few weeks to become the bride of her wealthy admirer. Miss Lee remained throughout the Palm Beach season, then went to Havana for the races and returned to New York with so many diamonds, gifts of impetuous admirers, that she bought a beautiful home on Long Island, moved her mother and sister from their residence on Second Avenue, is sending her little brother through school and is also on the point of being married to a Wall Street broker who has given her wise counsel upon how to invest her little savings in the stock market to make a small fortune.

Sometimes the gold digging of the chorus girls is done strictly according to law and many a large fee has been paid to attorneys by girls for settling breach of promise suits or by wealthy relatives of the gentleman in the case whose infatuation for some beauty led him to the stage door once too often. I can mention dozens of cases where "sugar daddies" averted breach of promise suits and where the girls were clever enough to hire a good lawyer.

One of the most notable cases of this kind was the perfectly legal transaction whereby a chorus girl was supposed to have received a settlement of $100,000 in return for breaking off an engagement. The girl who was featured as "the girl with the million dollar legs" because they were supposed to be such perfect examples of nether extremities, called upon me one day accompanied by her brother and announced that she had received a cablegram from her fiancé, a wealthy young chap from Milwaukee, asking her to join him in Paris to be married. She explained that although they were engaged she preferred to wait until his return to this country and she authorized me to make the announcement of the engagement. Her brother corroborated the story and so I sent it to the newspapers.

I do not doubt for one moment that the story was absolutely correct and that she and the young gentleman from Milwaukee were actually engaged. The boy's father, however, owner of several big department stores in Milwaukee, came to New York immediately, had his lawyer see the girl, and a few days later the young lady resigned from the show and

announced to the newspapers that she had broken her engagement. It was rumored at the time that a large settlement had been made by the father in return for which the young lady returned all of her fiancé's letters and promised never to see him again. The young lady admitted to me that she had received "Heavy dough," but declined to reveal the exact amount.

I see her now occasionally riding in Central Park in her own Rolls Royce car. It is back-stage gossip that she will never have to work again the rest of her life. She lives in a beautiful apartment on West End Avenue and has brought her mother and the rest of the family from the old home in Cincinnati to New York. The transaction of course was legal and legitimate in every way and it was the young lady's privilege to break off the engagement whenever she so desired. I think she was one of the cleverest girls who ever appeared in a Broadway chorus.

The story of Imogene Wilson will probably live long in the memories of those frequenters of Broadway in the summer of 1924. Imogene was probably the most beautiful show girl on Broadway. She came to New York in October, 1923, a demure and charming young girl of the most extraordinary ethereal blonde beauty. At the annual election of the Follies girls, a system I inaugurated after the style of Vassar College girls who form a class organization once a year, Imogene was voted by her sisters the most beautiful girl in the Follies.

It is impossible to write of her without mentioning the name of Frank Tinney, for the ensuing police

court affair was recorded around the world. No one can blame Tinney for admiring her, although he went a little too far when he selected her as a sparring partner. That, however, is ancient history and there is no use delving into it now. At the time of the court proceedings, when she had him arrested for beating her, Miss Wilson came into my office in the New Amsterdam Theatre and dictated to me the story of her life. This story was never printed for various reasons, but from it I take the liberty of quoting a few paragraphs of the story of her life which may be of interest now:

"Imagine waking up each morning to find one's photograph on the front page of every newspaper from Maine to California; to see one's name in sensational headlines narrating fictitious incidents that never occurred; to be the subject of editorial comment, of sermons in churches, of hundreds and thousands of letters from all parts of the country offering advice, sympathy, money, aid and assistance.

"As a result of my unfortunate experience with Frank Tinney, I would like to say this to every stage-struck girl: Marry, if you can find the right man; work as a stenographer, a model, a clerk, at anything honest and self-supporting, if you must, but keep to your home, enjoy the protection of your own family fireside (if you have one) and—unless you have very great talent—endure almost any hardships rather than be thrown into the whirlpool of Broadway life in which you will become almost automatically a storm-tossed petrel on the stormy seas, and in which

success comes only to the very limited number of girls who have exceptional beauty or talent.

"My earliest recollections date back to Louisville, Kentucky, where I was born. My father was Cannis Robertson, an architect, and a member of an old Kentucky family. He died when I was nine years old. My mother was Mary Covington, of Mayfield, Kentucky, and she died when I was only three years old. Her father, General Covington, had been a great slave holder before the war and was killed fighting for the Confederacy. I was left in the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Susanna Covington, of Mayfield, who died at the age of 100, after being one of the most conspicuous characters of that quaint Kentucky city for more than three generations. I mention these facts to show that I came from an old and aristocratic Southern family, which on my mother's side bears a name—Covington—which is borne by one of the leading cities of the State."

Miss Wilson furnishes a striking example of how a young and inexperienced girl coming into New York, with every natural advantage in her favor, experiences conditions that sooner or later make her the central figure of a sensation. Her advertising career has only begun and you will hear much of her in the future if my experience with famous stage beauties of the past is any criterion. I shall have more to say of her in a later chapter.

CHAPTER IX

Publicity and Beauty

Do you know the one great, glowing hope that burns in the hearts of nine-tenths of American girlhood? It isn't to marry wealth or nobility. It has nothing to do with travel or book-learning. It is to crash into Broadway's fabulous Beauty Trust—to win a hotly contested place in the front row of The Follies, The Music Box or a Charles Dillingham show—to have a battery of a thousand opera glasses trained on you—perhaps eventually to become an Ann Pennington, a Dorothy Stone or a Marilyn Miller.

Possibly that statement strikes you as absurdly sweeping, but I know what I am talking about. For years I have been a professional expert in making famous successful actresses. The inside story of this extraordinary profession (which is really an art) is astonishing.

There's no phase of it which I haven't studied as scrupulously as a professor, bent over his microscope, studies germs. And I assure you that the germ of ambition to make the grade with the big revue-producers is responsible for some amazing things where eager femininity is concerned.

It will take a girl like Imogene Wilson from her little Kentucky home, plant her in the Broadway

garden—and then hurl her into the newspaper headlines as the result of boomerang publicity, which turns and bites the hand that fed it.

It will, on the other hand, often raise a girl like Shirley Vernon from a $40-a-week job to $500-a-week, make her the talk of the big town, set managers quarreling for her services—and all because she finished a strip-golf game in a barrel down on Long Island!

These and other things in the craze of publicity will take a little factory girl like Polly Card from the mills of Pawtucket and catapult her upon the stage of a musical comedy and emblazon her under the alluring name of Harriet Victoria Chetwynd.

It will take a beautiful little girl from Montreal named Betty Compton and make her famous overnight as the premiere show girl of a production. It will lift a lovely young girl like Mae Daw from a Philadelphia high school, make her famous behind the footlights and marry her to the son of a New York bank president with a fortune of more than a hundred million dollars. On the other hand it may take a girl like Jessie Reed, simple and unsophisticated, make her one of the most famous of Broadway's beauties, marry her to a supposed millionaire like Dan Caswell (who really wasn't one) and then bring about a divorce so that she can marry an advertising clerk in Chicago who, it is said, may be receiving the magnificent salary of $50 a week.

All these things publicity can do, has done and will continue to do. But it must be the right kind of publicity. All the publicity in the world could not get an

engagement for "Peaches" Browning when she tried to capitalize her obnoxious and rather disgusting affair with Browning. Every theatrical manager on Broadway turned her down. The managers know that the public still likes its entertainment clean. But if the publicity is harmless and amusing, that is another story.

Publicity can take a little French midinette and turn her into an Alice Delysia, who thinks nothing of flaunting a million dollars' worth of diamonds before the footlights, and for whose sake men will fight duels and do even more wildly fantastic things.

It can cast such a glamour over a tiny Camden, New Jersey, cutie that in a year the whole country is talking about her $250,000 knees and the name "Ann Pennington" is as familiar as the commonest household word.

All this publicity can and does do. But the main point is that it must be legitimate, authentic, TRUE. In the old days a press-agent was a man who cooked up ingenious, but not very credible, lies, and by hook or crook got them printed. To-day we make, not fake, news. It may be synthetic in the sense of being carefully planned, but it is REAL. It actually happens. The camera's eye records it. The papers print it simply and solely because it is—news.

From the time a girl first goes upon the stage, she acquires a craving for notoriety in the belief that the more publicity she gets, the sooner she will become a star. While it is true that publicity helps tremendously and in fact cannot be dispensed with if one wishes to acquire fame and fortune, it is likewise true

that all of the puffing and boosting in the world will be absolutely futile if the subject thereof is incompetent or unable to "deliver the goods," as the saying is.

Of course, there have been exceptions to this rule and great fame and fortune have come to people who were totally devoid of talent, but it will be found that even those lacking in ability had some charm, personality or great beauty to make up for their other deficiencies.

Such a case of course was that of Gaby de Lys, the beautiful Parisian dancer who won fame overnight through the publicity circulated by her press agent that she was the cause of the downfall of King Emanuel of Portugal and that a necklace of fabulous value supposed to have been given her by the King so disrupted the royal finances that the angry public, disgusted with his excesses, overthrew the throne and exiled him in poverty.

As a matter of fact, Gaby de Lys was merely a second rate music hall singer in Paris who was press-agented into fame with a story that was not true in any particular. Her alleged romance with the King of Portugal was fiction inspired by her press agent. She came to America at a tremendous salary, showed her pretty face and exhibited her pretty legs. When she tried to sing, she had no voice; when she tried to dance, audiences saw she was too fat; and yet she had charm and personality and everyone crowded to see the girl because of her supposed romance. Her death was a great and unexpected loss. She died rather than submit to a simple operation which would

leave a scar upon her beautiful body. Her death to modern Paris was as great a shock presumably as the death of Camille.

Here in America the moment a girl joins the Ziegfeld "Follies" or any other big musical show, she longs for publicity. She sees around her famous beauties whose pictures appear in the newspapers with mythical stories of admirers, millionaires, diamond rings, pearl necklaces, yachts and all of the other attributes and prizes which are supposedly flung at the feet of *BEAUTY* as she emerges from the stage door. She may be a young and innocent kid like Peggy Shannon from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, or Mae Daw from Philadelphia with watchful mammas who grab them nightly at the stage door and tuck in the covers carefully every night on their darlings; but sooner or later, in the gossip of the dressing room, these innocent kids learn things that cause their ears to tingle and their eyes to open widely in anticipation of the future. Then, as the days go by and they read of the exploits of such beauties as Imogene Wilson, Helen Lee Worthing or Jessie Reed, they begin to think that they, too, should have their photographs published in the newspapers.

This craving for notoriety in the average new chorus girl is such that she will lie awake nights thinking of fascinating and novel exploits that will permit her to break into the front page of the newspapers. Dozens of times during my connections with various Broadway musical shows I have had ambitious young beauties come to me with fantastic yarns which they believed of sufficient news value to

"make the front page." In each case, I replied: "If it is true, yes. If it is something that you actually do and you go through with it even though it is manufactured news, I will submit it to the newspapers. If it is novel, the newspapers may print it, but I will not hand out a fake story."

If Miss Muriel Something-or-Other therefore of the "Follies" brought me her photograph and said that she was the great granddaughter of Robert E. Lee and the forty-second cousin of the first Governor General of Virginia, I required genuine proof before handing out the story to the newspapers.

On the other hand, however, if pretty little Mae Daw of the "Follies" wanted to challenge Ann Pennington to a cow-milking contest in the middle of January simply because a duly elected senator said everyone should be able to milk a cow, I was quite willing to help the combat. This famous battle took place at the Long Island home of James J. Corbett, the prize-fighter, and an army of newspaper men and photographers followed Miss Pennington and Miss Daw, on a cold day in January, to the barn on Mr. Corbett's estate and photographed the girls milking cows.

The point I am trying to bring out is that this contest actually took place. It was pre-arranged, but it really happened. The photographers proved it with attractive photographs of the two young ladies industriously milking cows. Neither one of them knew a thing about milking cows but they learned and had a good time and their photographs were

published from here to China, which was all they desired in the first place.

It was this genuine, all-wool-and-a-yard-wide publicity which, through the medium of a milk bath, turned the late Anna Held from an attractive nobody into a star of terrific brilliance. And the same story, coupled with champagne, almost ruined a manager and a chorus girl. And by means of a $100,000 diamond necklace carelessly twisted around a bouquet and tossed from a stage box into her lap, this same publicity catapulted Gilda Gray from modest popularity into a tremendous vogue.

Valeska Suratt's Fourth of July Christmas tree; Olga Nethersole's "Sapho" kiss, which scandalized the whole country; Ruth Urban's incredibly costly dinner party, at which a grunting pig was the guest of honor—all these episodes made the women concerned celebrated, almost illustrious, in the public's eyes.

The famous pig dinner was given at the Casino in Central Park by Miss Ruth Urban, the prima donna of the 1922 "Follies." Miss Urban came to me in distress one day and told me that she had broken off her engagement with a well known and wealthy young New Yorker who had paid her great attention.

"I hate him," she said. "He has treated me shamefully. In fact, I would sooner have dinner with a pig than with some men I know."

Right away, I suggested that we give a pig dinner. Why not? It was sure to make an interesting photograph and if we actually took photographs of it, it

meant widespread publicity of a kind which could do no harm.

Behold, therefore, several nights later prominent social and stage luminaries were invited by Miss Urban to a little dinner in the Casino in Central Park where C. F. Zittel has made this spot the only thing in New York that resembles Paris.

Covers were laid for thirty. The seat for the guest of honor at the right of Miss Urban was vacant as actors, society men, stage celebrities and others filed in to take their places. An orchestra was playing in the background and then in came the guest of honor —a beautiful pig, almost white, decorated with blue ribbons under his ugly snout and two waiters holding him quiet and trying to keep him from squealing. The pig was installed in a high chair and firmly tied in so he could not get out.

The dinner began; and while the choicest viands were placed before the guests, the pig indulged in nothing better than cornbeef and cabbage. Great was the hilarity as the evening grew on and great was the pleasure of Miss Urban as forty or fifty photographers took pictures of the scene. Great was her happiness when humorous accounts of the story appeared in various newspapers and great must have been the chagrin of a certain young man as he read the newspaper reports stating that the beautiful and famous prima donna preferred the society of a pig to that of some men she might mention.

A little ray of happiness for Miss Urban may be interpolated here. I saw her again some months later as she came from the stage door of another

Broadway theatre where she scored a success. A young man assisted her into a limousine as she smiled happily upon him. It was the same young man to whom she had been engaged and possibly it was the pig dinner that brought him back to her feet.

All of these exploits illustrate an interesting feature of the publicity given these stage stars. The story must be interesting, the story must be true and yet in order to secure the space these ladies lavishly desire, the story must have a touch of humor. It must give a bit of a laugh. It must be interesting and just preposterous enough to justify an editor in printing it and above all it must be about a young and beautiful lady or else the public yawns.

There are many other stories I could tell, but for the present I want to explain specifically the mad, irresistible urge which carries a girl behind the footlights into the enchanted realm of the Beauty Trust, where the true sorcerer is the press-agent who exploits her personality and his wand the magic staff of publicity stunts which she must obey.

I have in mind two instances which are typical. They concern two present-day stars with whom I was intimately associated as their herald and courier.

One has to do with the great and glittering Delysia, who leaped from the obscurity of a hat shop into a world-encircling limelight.

The other case concerns the dainty, diminutive Ann Pennington, who shot like a meteor into the skies of fame. I doubt if there is a dancer in the world better known than she, yet the astounding part of it is that

she was made by legitimate exploitation of, not her dancing, but of her knees!

Please don't think, now or later, that I am trying to deprive these and other ladies of their current glory. Indeed, I have referred to Alice and "Penny," instead of certain other celebrities of Broadway, because they prove my point that, once inside the Beauty Trust, talent and charm will carry many girls into undisputed stardom.

There's an interesting and suggestive idea behind that remark, and one which should be studied by every girl who reads these lines. For while I am not a professional Pollyanna, I do believe that good looks and brains go hand in hand, and that it is quite possible to be a cutie and a genius at the same time.

Delysia's case is certainly a striking support to my theory. Back in 1913, the stately prima donna, never dreaming that her name would one day be spread in huge lights over the Winter Garden and the Century Theatre, was a little fetch-and-carry kid in an obscure bonnet-shop in Paris.

To the untrained eye, she differed not a particle from the score of rosy, roguish, hard-toiling, hard-playing co-workers. A midinette is supposed—at least by her employers—to have just enough gray matter to wrap up parcels neatly, deliver them swiftly and be polite. But Delysia didn't stop there.

She had tremendous personal fire, "chic," individuality and a dash of deviltry. The germ of publicity must have lurked in her system, for she gained a sort of sectional fame by winning the famous Paris Midinettes' foot-race in 1913. Naturally her picture got

into the papers. And the next thing her astonished friends knew the lively Alice was decorating the front row of the festive and naughty, naughty Folies Bergere.

She might have languished there forever (French publicity methods are, to us Americans, a little slow) if it hadn't been for a curious bit of good luck. Charles Dillingham was planning a big New York revue, "Watch Your Step," with an all-star cast, and he particularly wanted six honest-to-goodness French girls for his ladies of the ensemble.

The Dillingham scout, in Paris, knew about the girl at the Folies Bergere with the great eyes and luscious coloring, and he promptly shipped her off to New York with five other scared little compatriots —not one of whom could speak a word of English!

Now see how capricious fortune is. Had Alice Delysia, who all the time was burning to put herself across with "those nice Americans" been able to talk Broadway slang, she would have landed with a wallop that might have jarred the Woolworth Building. But she couldn't, and so when the run of "Watch Your Step" ended, back to Paris she went, a bit disconsolate, but still with her faith in herself undimmed.

Luck lurked in her shadow. The World War broke out. Bent under the oppressive strain of near-by battles, Paris went theatre mad. Any old show, any young entertainer, was in high demand. Delysia mounted to stardom like a flash. Paris found her a captivating singer, and discovered that she could wear daring gowns as well as Regine Flory

or any of her delicately half-clad sisters of the Boulevard theatres.

And then Fate rang the bell for the former midinette. The British producer, Charles B. Cochran, drifted into the playhouse where she was performing; gave one look, gasped, called loudly for a blank contract, and rushed back-stage. If he could persuade this miraculous woman, with eyes that made all others look like lustreless coal, to come across the channel, all London would be at her feet.

Always a good guesser, Cochran this time guessed doubly right. He displayed Alice to England, much as if she were a precious stone or the latest gasp in gowning. England acclaimed her. Her vogue was unparalleled. She was the rage of Piccadilly.

But Delysia's triumph, which would have satisfied a commonplace woman, only made the flame of her ambition burn more wildly. She was longing for new worlds to conquer when Morris Gest, that extraordinary Russian genius and the most inspired press-agent of the universe, and myself invaded the British capital. We were looking for some new feminine cocktail with which to tease the blasé artistic palate of jaded New York.

Dropping in at the Pavilion, we saw Alice and knew our search was ended. Gest, who is excitable, crushed his famous velour hat, and shouted: "She's one in a million. We'll make her the talk of Broadway." And we did, in a manner that left Cochran and the Folies Bergere far in the lurch. And no one ever knew, when she dazzled Broadway as a star, that less than eight years previously she had been a chorus

girl for Dillingham at his Globe Theatre on Broadway. This fact was carefully suppressed.

The contract which Gest drew up was, in itself, unique. There was a solemn paragraph stipulating that, despite Prohibition, Mlle. Delysia was to be provided with "one bottle of wine at every meal" during her stay in the States. This, it was explained, was vitally necessary to her health and high spirits, "without which," the contract added, "Mlle. Delysia will pine away and her audience-value diminish."

All this was duly and fully printed and eagerly read by thousands of persons, who marveled that a French girl would risk inviting trouble at the hands of those cruel Federal agents, just to get a little jag on in the interests of art.

Let me add that that supposition was entirely wrong, for while Alice was a marvelous person to work with—she fell in with our maddest and seemingly most impossible scheme—she needed no tonic. She arrived in a dress of such astonishingly vivid red leather that fashion editors flocked to interview her, and the ankle watch which she casually sported was worth even more space. It was a flashing, diamond-encrusted, eight-angled affair, and could be seen without a telescope for half a mile. It helped to "plant" Delysia as a legitimate news source. Thereafter she never fell down on the job.

But it wasn't just childish skylarking. Occasionally, the French star, Gest and I got ourselves all jammed up in our endeavors to keep Delysia's name fresh in the public mind. It was hard work, in which

the elements of bad luck and, for her, distinct personal danger were not absent.

We had arranged to stage an apparently spontaneous "accident" in which a cunningly-trained police dog should leap at Alice while she was taking tea at a smart Long Island hostelry; "nearly" bite her, and raise the hue and cry, "More muzzles, or foreign artistes will never visit these shores again!"

The scheme overshot its mark and threw us into fits of nervous agitation. For the dog, in his efforts as a good actor to "get across," became so realistic that he actually hurled himself upon Alice, tearing her frock, dragging her to the ground, and frightening her out of her wits. She was scratched and bitten —but game to the end. And the theatre had to be closed for three nights.

An even worse ordeal (though not for Delysia) was the notorious "broken-glass courtship." At the time, even credulous readers might have been pardoned for doubting this story, which sounds like a page from those tales that de Maupassant wrote just before he was sent to a madhouse. Yet I give you my word that it was as real as death or taxes.

Delysia had become the furore of Broadway. Her gorgeous, eccentric costumes in "Afgar," our tireless publicity campaign in her behalf, the girl's own wit and geniality had made her famous. Established in a beautiful house on the fashionable East Side, she entertained many of the city's most picturesque Bohemians. There was also, always, a sprinkling of the "400"—including "eligible bachelors" of rank and renown.

One young man, in particular, had been deeply smitten with the charms of the French hostess. In the most delicate, but persistent, way he had tried to shower attentions upon her, but Alice treated him with a half-chilly, humorous tolerance. "You are only a boy," she would laugh. "Do not be imbecile. Zut! Go away and play wiz ze ozaire children."

One day I discovered that this importunate suitor (who incidentally was worth a couple of millions) had written our star a melodramatic and highly indiscreet note. There was one phrase in it that automatically caught my eye. "You doubt my love," it ran, "but you are wrong. Merely to kiss your hand, I would crawl over broken glass on my hands and knees."

The upshot of the matter was breath-taking. In Alice's sumptuous drawing-room, a few of her friends gathered on the appointed evening. Delysia, looking regal in black velvet and pearls, stood at one end of the apartment, awaiting her "cut-glass adorer." A case of champagne was opened, and with a small hammer I knocked the necks from half a dozen bottles, letting the starry fragments form a torturing pathway from the door to the hostess' feet.

Suddenly, brushing aside the astonished butler, the millionaire, whom I shall call Mr. Q., appeared on the threshold. Alice greeted him. "You said you would crawl over broken glass on your hands and knees to get me. Let me see you crawl."

The young man was very pale, but calm and intense. He bowed low for an instant, then dropped to the floor and, without another word, proceeded to

creep on his hands and knees across the glass-strewn carpet.

We stood by, hypnotically fascinated at the sight of a handsome fellow in evening clothes making a spectacle of himself like a Hindu mystic in the throes of ecstatic martyrdom.

Delysia, who is an entirely human person, looked sick with horror. And just as she seemed on the point of fainting dead away, the "cut-glass adorer" made the grade and rose to his feet before her.

"I've made good," he cried triumphantly. "Now what about yourself?" He got his hard-earned reward. But I think he was cured of stage idolatry.

* * * *

So much for the great Delysia campaign. Less spectacular, but not a whit less efficacious, was the Pennington drive, which put little Ann over the top to the tune of one of the world's fattest salaries.

Her background wasn't particularly auspicious for a career. Her family (they lived in Camden, New Jersey) were worthy people without an ounce of social pretense or an iota of wealth. But that didn't deter Ann (then Anna) from getting on the Philadelphia ferryboat and digging up the necessary funds to study with Walter G. Wroe, who ran a professional school.

Miss Pennington, in 1913, crashed the Beauty Trust to the extent of getting placed with the Ziegfeld Follies. She wasn't a principal, not by a jugful, and to tell the truth she was just a fair-to-middling stepper. She was too young, for one thing. But she

improved vastly and swiftly, and meanwhile the eagle eye of Florenz Ziegfeld had noted one thing about her that was to make her famous, beloved and wealthy, though "Penny" was deliciously unaware of that great asset.

Ziegfeld, who is a great showman, was watching a chorus rehearsal one day while Julian Mitchell put the ponies through their paces. During a lull "Ziggy" picked Ann out of the bunch and told her to lift her dancing frock half an inch so that he could look more carefully at her knees. He studied them as a lapidary studies an opal, and summed up his findings in the one word: "Perfect."

Miss Pennington's promotion (which really was due largely to her own genuine merits) was accompanied by a perfect fanfare about those priceless knees.

To-day she is a really superb dancer and doesn't have to depend on freak stunts, though she occasionally—and wisely—indulges in them so the public will not forget her.

GERALDINE FARRAR

(Special train en route to Hollywood)

(l. to r. on platform) Mrs. Morris Gest, Morris Gest and Geraldine Farrar. (l. to r. front line) Train officials and reporters, Will A. Page, Sydney Farrar, Mrs. David Belasco, "Jimmie" Sullivan, Mrs. Farrar and Frank Connor.

CHAPTER X

Temper and Temperaments

Unrestrained egotism is the greatest ailment which can possibly affect a theatrical star. The size of the head and the temperature of the temperament increases according to the amount of publicity bestowed upon them and the favor with which most of them are received by the public.

In the course of twenty years on Broadway, dealing personally with temperaments of all kinds and stars of all magnitudes, I have seen the regrettable results which follow when the mental poise and balance of the theatrical stars suffer from delusions of grandeur.

Not that all stars are this way. There are dozens of young stars to-day ambitious and keenly anxious to succeed in the ranks of the great theatrical game of entertaining the public. They have profited in many cases by observing the antics of other stars. The newspapers also have done wonderful work to restrain the egotism which often unexpectedly manifests itself. Ridicule and adverse comment in the newspapers have done much to keep down swelling heads, but as one looks back over the record of a busy career on Broadway, one can easily recall some of these amazing incidents and laughable absurdities which at the time no doubt seemed very serious to

the managers and coterie of advisers of the stars whose temperament suddenly broke all bounds.

I hope the mention of some of our most notable temperaments will not be regarded as a reflection upon their charming talents or their abilities as actresses. I only mention them to point out how trivial incidents can be turned into ridicule and perhaps affect an artistic career.

I have in mind, for instance, the appearance of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, the prominent English actress, who was at the high tide of her popularity when an indiscretion on her part caused so much ridicule that it virtually ruined her American tour.

While playing in New York at the Republic Theatre, she claimed that her nerves were affected by the passing of traffic on the cobblestones in front of the theatre. This was before the days of automobiles and paved streets. She requested her business manager, Mr. A. Toxen Worm, to have tanbark spread upon the cobblestones to deaden the noise.

Mr. Worm, being one of the most brilliant publicity experts of his time, jumped at the opportunity and employed a contractor to spread tanbark and sawdust over the street in front of the theatre. Then, being a true showman and knowing of the controversy that would ensue, he telephoned the Street Cleaning Department demanding that it be removed.

The star broke on the front page of all the newspapers. The English actress was ridiculed for a case of temperament and nerves, and Worm was henceforth known as A. "Tanbark" Worm.

One of my earliest assignments in the service of a fascinating prima donna was to act as business manager for Miss Fritzi Scheff. She had just arrived from Germany to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, where, because of her dynamic energy and fascinating qualities, she was hailed as "the little devil of grand opera." After one season at the Metropolitan, her vogue was so great that Charles Dillingham presented her in a number of musical comedy successes, notably "Mme. Modiste."

Miss Scheff was charming and unaffected at first, but as her name went up in electric letters and adulation was poured upon her, she became more and more temperamental. She surrounded herself with a retinue of servants and maids. She would not let the chorus girls walk across the stage while she was rehearsing. She made excessive demands on hotels for suites where her nerves could rest in absolute quiet. She carried her own cook to prepare her meals after declaring that hotel food was impossible.

She once had her maid telephone to my room at the Congress Hotel in Chicago at three o'clock in the morning in great excitement. Johanna, the maid, said Madame insisted that I must come to her apartment. I awoke from a sound slumber, dressed and responded to the call with the alacrity of a fireman sliding down the brass pole. Johanna met me at the door.

"Madame says," she spoke with a German accent, "will you be so good as to take the dog out for a walk?"

Was I a dog man? I felt as O. Henry's hero felt in the charming short story of that famous author—I felt like kicking the dog into the lake, but I did not. I smiled, promenaded with the little beast on Michigan Avenue on a bitterly cold night and finally retired wondering what freak of temperament our charming star would indulge in next.

But Fritzi was charming in spite of her idiosyncrasies and the public loved her. She guarded her voice with such care that she would never walk upon a wet sidewalk until someone had spread a roll of red carpet across the sidewalk to the stage door. Her business manager, Nat Roth, who always brought her to and from the theatre, carried the roll of red carpet always in the automobile. When her motor arrived at the stage door, Roth would get out, carefully unroll the red carpet across the sidewalk and then our dear Fritzi would promenade gayly with a "Thank you" into the theatre while Roth would remain outside and roll up the red carpet to be used when next required. Of course he usually had a stage hand help him, but he superintended the laying of the carpet.

Madame Fritzi had three husbands and I suspect one reason was her temperament. The first, and the one who came to this country as her escort during the days of "Mlle. Modiste," was the Baron Hans Von Bardeleben. While he was here he conceived the idea of selling German picture cards. I do not say that Fritzi encouraged him to go into trade, but I do know that practically every season he was shipped off on long tours to the Pacific coast to sell

the picture cards, while the fascinating prima donna sang in New York.

Her second husband, of course, as everyone knows, was John Fox, and after their divorce she married George Anderson, her leading man. By this time she had quarrelled with nearly all of her managers, and when she finally broke with the Shuberts, she and Anderson entered vaudeville. From the heights of the Metropolitan as a queen of opera comique, Fritzi's temperament finally led her to vaudeville.

I saw her last winter, charming and lovely as ever, with her voice unimpaired, and she laughed many times over the little eccentricities in which she had indulged in younger days. "If I had to do it over again," she said, "the story would have been different." Always a lovely, charming and attractive woman, Madame Scheff to-day is one of the brilliant stars of vaudeville and a headliner of the first magnitude. She may make even more money now than she did in the days when managers fought for her services.

Olgo Nethersole had the most explosive temperament of any star I ever represented. Her scenes, however, always took place in front of a third person, and in most instances were chiefly inspired with the idea of acting before an audience. She found fault with more things than I ever dreamed existed on this earth, from the coffee being too cold or the butter too soft, or the stage too cold or the dressing room too warm, or her name in type that was too small or some other name in type that was too large; anything under the sun for the purpose of an argument, and usually over the most trivial incident in the world.

Over big things she never quarrelled. When it came to a question of engaging an actor at some large salary, she would sigh but submit. If business at the theatre, in her judgment, was larger than the figures on the box office statement indicated, she would ask me to send back the ticket boxes and she and her own secretary, Madge Fields, would personally count the tickets to see whether or not any cheating had been done. I have known her to give an elaborate supper to newspaper men after the theatre, spending hundreds of dollars for food and champagne, then whisper to Madge to be sure to save the rolls and butter for breakfast the next morning.

Yet Miss Nethersole was a wonderful star, and in her day without an equal. The only reason she is no longer with us is that with the outbreak of the war she engaged in war work in London and did brilliant and useful service, looking after the canteens and amusements for the British Army in France. When the war was over, she was so broken in health that she decided to retire from the stage. Her "Sapho" and "Carmen" made theatrical history, and will never be forgotten in this country. Except for her little eccentricities, she was one of the most delightful feminine stars I have ever known. Her leading man in "Carmen" was billed as "Nathaniel Hartwig." You may find his name now in the roster of the Stock Exchange as "Hartwig Baruch." He is the brother of Bernard Baruch, international financier, and of Sailing Baruch, boulevardier and first nighter. A famous family!

I could mention dozens of others all of whom had their brief time in the spotlight of Broadway, have played their parts to the applause of the crowds, and who are no longer here with us to-day.

Maxine Elliott, the most gracious and beautiful of stars whose chief fault of temperament was that she would never consent to be interviewed, made a fortune on Broadway, played the stock market with judicious advice, built a theatre of her own in New York, which still pays her a handsome revenue, and then invaded English society so successfully that only the other day when her niece, the daughter of her sister, Gertrude Elliott, was married, she was able to give the young couple a wedding present of $500,000. Yet it seems only a few years ago Maxine and her sister Gertrude, whose family name was Mac Dermont, and who came from Portland, Maine, were seeking engagements on Broadway, and Maxine was leading lady of a stock company—The Tim Frawley stock of San Francisco—when Nat Goodwin made her first his leading woman and then his fourth wife. The beginning of her fortune really started when she divorced Goodwin and obtained a goodly financial settlement in lieu of alimony.

Geraldine Farrar,—Ah! there was a temperament exquisite! The life of the party when acting as a hostess for one of her inimitable parties or the temperamental prima donna when facing the footlights and ready to quarrel unconstrainedly with the conductor of the Metropolitan if he dared to disagree with her.

The story of Miss Farrar's tempestuous life at the Metropolitan and of her battles royal with Toscanini

and others, is too well known to opera lovers for me to repeat here. Besides, I was not personally present as an eye witness, and only received my reports of the episodes from the vivandieres and camp followers who witnessed the affrays from afar.

It happened, however, that in the year Farrar entered motion pictures, having been lured into this radical step by the indefatigable Morris Gest, I was invited by her to spend three months in California as her official biographer, and to write the book which you may now find in many libraries entitled, "My Life So Far," by Geraldine Farrar. The arrangement was made through *The Ladies Home Journal,* which acquired the serial rights.

Thus it happened that I became a member of the famous party which accompanied Geraldine across the continent to Hollywood at the time she made her debut in the movies in the production of "Carmen." Morris Gest was the impressario who succeeded in negotiating the deal with Jesse Lasky, and who acted as Miss Farrar's personal manager during her invasion of movie-land.

Under the terms of this contract Farrar was to leave her home on West 74th Street with anybody she pleased up to the number of twenty-five people, and without a cent in her pocketbook, without even a check book. Every item of expense from the time she left her New York home until she returned three months later was paid under the contract by Morris Gest and Jesse Lasky, who at that time had not yet joined forces with the present movie king, Adolph Zukor.

Farrar was paid for her services during this time at the rate of two dollars a minute. Figure it up for yourself if you are good at mathematics. The bookkeepers in Hollywood nearly went crazy trying to keep track of Farrar's salary in which she collected two dollars for every minute that she was on this trip.

It was a merry party that Geraldine gathered around her for her pleasant vacation to the wilds of Hollywood; her mother, Mrs. Farrar, and her father, Sydney Farrar; Morris Gest and his charming wife, Reina Belasco Gest, Mrs. David Belasco, Frank Connor, who was Geraldine's leading man, "Jimmy" Sullivan, her official pianist, and myself.

Sullivan is one of the unique and charming figures of New York's Bohemian and social life. As Oscar Wilde said, he does nothing, but does it charmingly. Of an old New York family with a pleasing allowance from a doting mother, with a wardrobe of nearly two hundred suits of clothes, and four hundred and fifty cravats, not to mention seventeen pairs of spats, "Jimmy" Sullivan was at that time one of New York's adored young men.

Farrar invited him along as her guest because he is unquestionably America's long distance piano player. He proved that on the trip by playing continuously day and night from the time we left New York until we reached Hollywood.

Through the American desert and past the water tanks where amazed Indians congregated to see the train go by, Sullivan played and played and played. His repertoire seemed inexhaustible and strange as it

may seem for a pianist, for a prima donna he played nothing but jazz music. Farrar was on a lark. She danced her way gayly across the great American desert and on warm afternoons, I especially remember, the famous prima donna who was clad only in a negligee because of the extreme heat, amazed and delighted everyone in the private car by climbing upon the top of the piano and dancing a buck and wing dance while Jimmy Sullivan played the piano in rapturous devotion.

Outside, on the rear platform sat an uninvited guest—a brakeman who, according to the rules of the Sante Fe Railroad in Arizona, must travel on the rear platform of every train. He looked inside at the proceedings in our private car in amazement and said to me finally, "Is that dame nutty?"

Farrar was not "nutty" as the brakeman so eloquently expressed it, but she was having a good time. There were occasional outbursts of temperament of course; when the cinders were flying heavily or the dust was choking or the chops were not cooked to her liking, or the wine was not properly iced; but in the long run the trip across the continent was a relaxation for her rather than an opportunity to display her egotism. That came later "on the lot."

From the moment she arrived in Los Angeles and was officially welcomed by the Mayor, a brass band, an avalanche of flowers and 150 school girls singing the National Anthem in greeting (all arranged in advance by telegraph by Morris Gest as an advertising stunt) Farrar was on dress parade. She was

again on terra firma. She was once more "the grand lady of the opera."

From that time on for three months, every minute of the day and night she acted. Her demands at the studio became more and more formidable and unreasonable every day. Dressing rooms were not satisfactory, so she had her own bungalow built. Scenarios were all wrong so she, a novice, re-wrote them. The directors were all wrong, even Cecil de Mille with whom she argued. Her maids led uncomfortable lives; the servants employed by Lasky for the large furnished house rented to accommodate her resigned nearly every day and were replaced by others.

The advent of Geraldine Farrar in Hollywood upset the movie colony more than anything that had ever happened to them up to that time, and caused nearly as much excitement as later scandals which made movie-land talked about. And on one memorable night she gave a party—and met Lou Tellegen. But that is another story.

Geraldine came back to New York at last still the grand lady of the opera. Her temperamental fits were never discontinued, and finally the appearance of her rival, Jeritza, caused another temperamental outburst, and led to her resignation and her retirement to head her own company. She is now embarking upon her own enterprise, under her own management, still the grand lady of the opera, and still boasting of a temperament that has been unequalled so far as I know in the past twenty years. Charming, lovely, beautiful and gracious but oh! how temperamental.

Lovely feminine stars without temperaments still exist in the theatrical world. There is Marilyn Miller, as I have mentioned, sweet unaffected simplicity; Vivienne Segal, young, talented, and lovely; Lenore Ulric, adored by every one she knows; Ina Claire, popular and absolutely lacking in self-consciousness or conceit; Dorothy Stone, the sweetest young prima donna on Broadway and one of the most talented. Dozens of others that I might mention, but I will not for lack of space; and then on the other hand I shall never forget the night Elsie Ferguson refused to go on at the Gaiety Theatre in a new play until the property man had nailed a brass star five inches in diameter on the door of her dressing room to indicate that she "was" in reality the star of the show, something many people might not have known otherwise.

And such are a few of the stars of the theatrical world and the great Beauty Trust of Broadway—Not all bad, but some are better than others.

CHAPTER XI

Making News

Disdain, ridicule, physical injury and even possible death—these are but a few of the hurdles which ambitious members of the Broadway Beauty Trust will lightly leap in order to gain the limelight.

To most of my readers it may seem incredible that a young and lovely girl would sacrifice her dignity, her social poise and, worst of all, her bodily safety for the sake of a first-page newspaper headline. There is literally almost *nothing* at which a front-row charmer will balk, once the germ of self-exploitation gets into her blood. The thought of that magic open-sesame, Publicity, may enslave her just as effectually as hasheesh or brandy might a man. I tell you, its grip is death-like.

Perhaps it strikes you as curious that, in recounting the hidden chuckles and heartaches of the White Lane, I have dragged in so sombre a word as death. Yet I am not straining a point just to be "dramatic." Let me give you samples of what I mean.

I am thinking in particular of the once-famous boat race of the Follies maidens, which, although planned with fool-proof precision and engineered in masterly fashion, nearly cost one life and jeopardized several others.

At the time I was acting as vizier of publicity to that inimitable caliph, "Ziggy." Our ladies of the ensemble" were, beyond question, the fairest and highest-salaried in Manhattan. The "Standing Room Only" sign was hung out nightly. We were, actually, the talk of the town.

But any crafty producer knows that it is not enough to succeed for the moment. It is not enough that the ticket-rack be empty for one week, and the till bursting with checks and currency. If he be wise, he builds against the future, using mouth-to-mouth gossip as his trowel.

That is what we proceeded to do. We announced that on a certain afternoon every single pony, showgirl and sub-principal from the Follies would be taken to Central Park; would go through the preliminary setting-up exercises of the average collegiate oarsman and then would take part in a boat race on the lake.

The idea which I want to stress here is that, while this contest was synthetic in origin, it really happened! There were real boats. The cuties, in their trim sweaters and white trunks, were as real as flesh and blood. And the accident which ensued was real, although it was far from being a staged effect. It gave us all an unexpected thrill!

We went about our task of "presenting" the race with methodical, scrupulous zeal. We got permission from the municipal authorities to launch our squads of feminine loveliness on the lake. We invited Park Commissioner Francis H. Gallatin to preside as umpire. He accepted. The Police Department was

Photo by Harold Stein

MILKING CONTEST OF "FOLLIES" GIRLS

(l. to r.) Mae Daw, James J. Corbett, referee, and Ann Pennington, also the Cow.

asked to send out special patrols to keep back the inevitable crowds on the bank—and it did.

Simple as the scheme may seem, it was sure-fire. It was, for one thing, legitimate news, and the papers couldn't afford to pass it up. Then it gave the "Johns" and the joshers, the millionaires and the clerks who had gazed at the Ziegfeld beauties across the footlights a chance to see those same young women in action, blistering tender hands on rough oars, yet looking every bit as alluring minus powder and rouge.

There was only one joker in the plan, namely, that most of the flowers of the Follies knew much more about riding on steam yachts than they did about propelling scow-like craft. You think they weren't game, and held back on that account? You're wrong. They volunteered in droves and there wasn't a single quitter. I've always maintained that nerve and comeliness could be combined in a single shapely head. I was doubly sure of it that day.

Under a coppery sun, unrelieved by a breath of wind, girls who, the night before, had minced across the New Amsterdam stage, wearing gowns worth a king's ransom and jewels and furs, braced their tiny feet firmly and tugged at the heavy oars like Trojans. Roped off on the bank, packed, attentive humanity looked on in open admiration of their efforts. Dozens of men followed in rowboats. It was the first time in my life I had ever met "Water-Johns"—the antitheses of the stage door Johns.

Here and there came a gasp of weariness from a participant. Now and then a tired contestant would relax her grasp and close her eyes from sheer fatigue. A great, throaty "Hurrah!" went up when Blanche Mehaffey, clever stroke, dashed across the line to victory. She had won the race; a silver cup, and, incidentally, a fleeting fame that clinched a big movie contract for her. You can see her name featured on the electric signs now. But her excitement wasn't to be compared to that of every person clustered around the park pool when an unlooked-for and frightening incident occurred.

One little girl, Pearl Eaton, sister of the famous Mary Eaton and a beautiful blonde sight in a white sweater. But she was particularly inexpert on the water. She wasn't afraid, or fidgety, or up-stage; she was just inexperienced. Had we cast her for the role of coxswain, everything would have been sitting pretty — including the amateur sportswoman. But we didn't and—

Out of the tense stillness which attends every race there came first a faint cry, which shrilled up into a wail, and then the sound of ripping wood. Pearl had miscalculated the stroke; had slewed her craft sharply about, and had crashed, head on, into a rival boat! The watchers, including, let me add, myself, were panicky. I couldn't convince myself that a real accident had taken place. Yet it had all the earmarks of genuineness.

For a flash, that particular spot on the lake's surface seemed to be composed of flying limbs, glinting,

golden hair, vivid splotches of costume-color, and—pandemonium. Fortunately, it was *only* a flash, for the first boat righted itself, while the second, half-immersed, was an easy mark for the life-guards who plunged in; bailed it out, and rescued Pearl and her naturally horrified companions.

The throng cheered as they were towed ashore, and we knew that we had "landed" an unbeatable story again for the newspapers. But I never think of that afternoon without a little qualm, knowing as I do, that even the publicity stunt which runs on frictionless gears is apt to over-reach itself and trench on tragedy. Happily, in this case, no real harm was done, if you discount a few spilled tears and the "ducking" that Pearl received.

I could recite a hundred other stories—some comic, some pathetic, some tragic, and all true—of the inside workings of the limelight bug. I could tell of the unique "surf jazz" party of the Follies chorus at Rockaway Beach for which Mae Daw trained for weeks on a saxophone. I could recall Jean Stewart and the baby lamb she installed in her suite in the Congress Hotel, in Chicago, so she wouldn't be lonely. Or, I could give the truly astonishing case of Martha Lorber, who popped out of nowhere into a record salary simply because she had the grit, in Morris Gest's production of "Mecca" to dance for fifteen minutes on a draughty stage in a two-piece Grecian flimsy and then risk pneumonia by remaining motionless for another fifteen minutes in a series of tableaux.

But not all the daring and nerve and originality in stunts in the world—not all the millions! — can "put over" a pretty face unless the public likes it. I have seen "angel" after "angel" go bankrupt on Broadway trying to prove the reverse of this statement. I could give you a score of cases to prove my point, but before doing so let me tell the inside story of the "strip golf game."

SHIRLEY VERNON

Former Ziegfeld beauty who acquired fame overnight by playing "Strip-golf."

CHAPTER XII

The Celebrated Strip Golf Game

One of the most amusing publicity episodes with which I was ever connected was the celebrated strip golf game which was played on the links of the Sound View Golf Club at Great Neck, Long Island. It was obviously intended as a publicity stunt for advertising purposes only, but it also developed as extraordinary news value for the newspapers because it was actually played and was, I believe, the first time such an event took place. Its publicity value was such that it elevated from the competitive obscurity of the chorus, a girl who was getting $45.00 per week so that in less than eighteen months she was receiving a salary of $500.00 a week and was featured with her name in electric letters in association with such a celebrated star as Leon Errol.

I refer of course to the beautiful Miss Shirley Vernon who performed the almost unprecedented feat of jumping from the chorus into near stardom as a result of a bet. Without reflecting in the least upon the undoubted beauty and talent of Miss Vernon it can easily be pointed out that there were—and are—at least One Hundred other young ladies of equal beauty and talent on Broadway who might have done the same thing if the spot-light of publicity

had given them the opportunity. Miss Vernon, however, was given the opportunity and she made good.

The whole episode happened as a result of a little wager I made when Miss Vernon was still in the chorus of the Ziegfeld Follies. I remarked that I was anxious to find out whether or not publicity could really help anyone and I made the proposition that if she would carry out certain suggestions, I believed I could demonstrate that given a certain amount of unusual talent, publicity could actually make her a star inside of a year. It actually took a year and a half before the prediction was fulfilled and Shirley really had her name in electric letters. But the episode I am about to describe was the first stepping stone leading to success. Because of its interesting features I believe that it is worth relating now. Miss Vernon has now attained a position where she does not need to perform such "stunts" to advance herself in her profession, but the story of the strip golf game proved such a valuable medium of advertising for her that I am going to relate it in detail.

I will mention in passing that since then I have seen pictures of Miss Vernon attired only in a barrel, finishing at the eighteenth hole, printed in newspapers in Tokio, Yokohama, Melbourne, Bombay, Moscow, Paris and London, all with amusing comments on the eccentricities of American actresses who resort to such extraordinary efforts to secure publicity. However, the fact remains that when this episode took place Miss Vernon was in the chorus of the Ziegfeld Follies and the unusual stunt brought her so many offers from movie managers and theatrical

producers that Ziegfeld was compelled to raise her salary time after time, make her the premier dancer of the "Follies" and he ultimately featured her in Marilyn Miller's role in "Sally" which she played an entire season as a co-star with Leon Errol.

Of course everybody has heard about "strip poker" —where you strip off something every time you lose a hand. It is an amusing game; and in mixed company would seem to offer highly dramatic opportunities.

But it remained for me and a bunch of "Follies" beauties to apply the idea to golf, and invent the new game of "strip golf."

"I'm just crazy about golf," said Shirley Vernon, in her dressing room, after the show one evening. "I fell in love with the game down at Palm Beach this Winter."

Shirley is a delicate blonde, and she had been carefully coached as to what to say.

"Golf! I don't believe you play eighteen holes in eighteen years," remarked Nellie Savage, who really plays a fairly good game. Nellie is a vivacious brunette.

"You've never seen me on the links," Miss Vernon replied, sweetly.

"You're all right on the stage where you don't have to wear anything, but with your clothes on you could never swing a golf club," said Miss Savage.

"I could play better without the conventional restrictions, no doubt," Miss Vernon conceded, "though I once lost very shockingly at 'strip poker.'"

"Strip poker! There's an idea!" exclaimed Miss Savage. "I believe you would do very well on the links at 'strip golf.' "

"I'll challenge you right now, Nellie Savage, to eighteen holes at 'strip golf'—same rules as 'strip poker'—you strip off something every time you lose a hole to me, and I strip off something every time I lose to you."

"I can win that easily, Shirley, because my game is good with my clothes on and your game won't begin to get good until you've stripped everything off—and by that time you'd have lost the game."

By this time the girls had changed their flimsy nothingness of "Follies" costumes, and had on their street clothes, and as they left the dressing room, half a dozen other girls joined them on their way to the usual early morning after-the-show supper with the usual admiring group of sit-up-all-night young men who pay for the "Follies" girls' suppers and cabs and other things.

In the course of the supper, Nellie Savage mentioned the "Strip Golf" challenge to Shirley Vernon, and they were surprised at the enormous and wholehearted enthusiasm with which all the men in the party endorsed the proposition, and insisted that there should be no delay in pulling off the match.

It was then Sunday morning, and early hours of dawn, and one of the party suggested that they bundle into his automobile and go down to the Sound View Golf Club at Great Neck, Long Island, where he guaranteed the girls would find the links in perfect condition. Before going Miss Vernon telephoned

WYN RICHMOND

An exquisite type of blonde musical comedy beauty.

me to join the party as referee—and I of course tipped off the photographers and some newspaper reporters. They all responded at once, seeing a new "stunt" that was real, with great picture possibilities.

It was decided to play the entire eighteen holes. If a hole was halved the girls would not take anything off. If one of them lost the hole she could take off any part of her wearing apparel that she wished.

The links were lovely, the day was lovely and, indeed, everything was perfectly lovely when the match began. It was rather early still and no one was about, except the little group who had come down with the two players. A couple of early birds of caddies were found and the game began.

Miss Vernon wore a light Spring coat, a shirtwaist and a pair of golfing knickers, offset by a pair of golfing hose and shoes. And of course, a little something under them.

Miss Savage was dressed in a light skirt, hat to match and a white sweater, and also the usual undergarments.

The first hole was a distance of 367 yards. Miss Vernon made a good drive down the fairway. Miss Savage followed her. Miss Vernon's next shot was a brassie, and she hit the ball another 150 yards in the direction of the green. Nellie, however, sliced her ball into a trap, but took her niblick and made a beautiful recovery, the ball landing just short of the green. Shirley's mashie shot was good also and her ball rolled to within four feet of the flag. There was some little suspense as Miss Vernon stepped up to

putt out for a par four, but something went wrong and the little ball didn't roll into the hole, and both girls took fives.

Neither, therefore, took off a thing.

About this time, by some mysterious wireless, it began to be buzzed about at the country club house that there was something unusual going on down on the links. A couple of elderly and rather prim-faced ladies and a well-preserved but jovial-looking gentleman lined up with the companions of the players.

"But this is shocking!" exclaimed one of the prim ladies after the peculiar possibilities of the game had been explained.

"Not yet, Susan," objected the jovial-faced gentleman. "I see nothing shocking as yet."

"The future will tell," remarked Susan acidly.

"Let us hope so!" replied the jovial-looking gentleman heartily—and ambiguously—as he gazed at the charming figures of the Misses Vernon and Savage.

By the time Shirley arrived at the green she had taken seven strokes to Miss Savage's three, so she conceded the hole to her opponent, and sticking to the rules of the wager, took off her coat. She seemed a little bit more comfortable with this off, and on the 525-yard third hole made a pretty drive, but sliced her ball into the rough. Nellie did also, and drove out of bounds, thereby losing two strokes and driving over again. By the time the hole was over Shirley had taken nine strokes and Nellie—ten.

Here, Nellie took off her shoes instead of her hat, and gave everybody a surprise. She did this because she claimed that the hat shaded the sun from her

eyes, and with her shoes off she could get a firmer stance.

By this time there were half a dozen more early golf birds added to the gallery. The last arrival was a youngish gentleman with a far away look in his eyes and a slight unsteadiness in his gait. He looked, in fact, as though he had been sitting up all night with some sick friend. He stood solemnly before Nellie as she unlaced her shoes.

"Pardon me," he said, "but do you really intend to play this out to a finish? Because if you do, if you will pardon me, I will hang around. Otherwise, if, you will excuse me, I had better be going."

Nellie assured him that if it was not she, it would be Shirley. But he shook his head sadly.

"No," he said, "it wouldn't be worth it. Nothing interesting about that. You see my wife is a blonde."

He took another long look at Nellie's brunette beauty and sighed:

"Well, I guess I will stay," he said. "After all, you might lose."

The fourth hole was the shortest they had come to—it was only 356 yards. Nellie lost and took off her stockings. The caddies now began to exhibit more interest in their work and the gallery crowded a little closer.

At the next hole Shirley took a 7 while Nellie finished up with an 8. Nellie was now reduced outwardly to her skirt, her sweater and her hat. Which should she discard.

"I must keep on my hat," she decided. A perceptible thrill went through the crowd. And Nellie

took off her sweater. Beneath it was the daintiest confection of the upper part of a combination ever seen, all silk, and ribbons and little fringed flowers.

Miss Vernon fell down badly on the next hole, taking a 12 while Miss Savage took a 6. And seeing that Nellie was playing a better game with her shoes and stockings off, she decided that that was probably her trouble. So she followed suit and took her shoes and stockings off.

The seventh hole was a very short one, but somehow or other Miss Vernon could not get back to her game. She lost again and seemed to be in a quandary whether to take off her shirtwaist or knickers. She decided to take off the shirtwaist. She explained that her reason for doing this was because it would give her more freedom of the arms and she was sure to be more subtle in her stroke and have a freer and easier swing. So she took the shirtwaist off.

And Shirley lost the next hole, too. She removed her knickerbockers. Beneath them were a pair of silken bloomers.

All that she had on now were those bloomers, and a chemise. In order to keep them on she must win all the remaining holes.

The gallery was firm in its belief that it could not be done. The two prim-faced ladies, who had appeared at the beginning of the match, implored the well-preserved gentleman to leave the scene at once with them. But he was obdurate.

The youngish man who wanted to see Miss Savage win took sides unexpectedly with the two ladies.

"Now, if it had been the other one, the brunette, old man," he said, "I would not blame you a bit. But honestly, take my word for it, blondes are much overrated." But still the well-preserved gentleman would not go.

The next hole was halved. The disappointed gallery at this point grew indignant and there were cries of "Frameup!" "Fake!"

On went the two girls to the ninth hole—Shirley in her pretty chemise and silken bloomers; Nellie in her skirt, silken underwaist and still clinging to her hat.

The hole was only 105 yards, and it seemed an easy matter to reach the green on the drive, but both girls were plainly nervous. At the last both balls were twenty yards from the flag.

Miss Vernon stopped to measure the distance between her ball and the cup, and just as she hit it someone in the gallery sneezed explosively. The sneeze rippled through the tense silence like the rush of an 18-inch shell over a graveyard.

And it was all over! Miss Vernon missed the hole. Miss Savage landed in it.

What was Miss Vernon to do? If she took off her bloomers she would have on practically nothing from the waist down. If she took off her chemise, she would have absolutely nothing from the waist up. What was she to do?

The gallery waited anxiously for her decision. It was a tense moment. And then someone, moved with pity for her predicament, suggested getting a barrel. At this there were violent protests. But the tender-hearted ones won. One of the caddies was sent to the

tool house and came back with a barrel. Two of the men gave up their belts for straps, four little holes were made in the rim, the straps were fastened to them and the barrel was lifted over Miss Vernon's head and the straps adjusted to her white shoulders.

But unlucky Miss Vernon was hardly able to play at all with the barrel handicap. She missed stroke after stroke, fanning the air two out of three times. And as she went along from hole to hole the crowd showed plainly that it was very sorry for her.

It kept on urging her to take that barrel off and be comfortable. But Shirley said no. It was very kind of them and all of that to be so solicitous about her comfort, but after all it was good discipline, said Miss Vernon.

There once was a man named Dumb As-the-Knees, or something like that, probably because he couldn't talk very well, she explained, and he put a lot of pebbles in his mouth and learned to talk through them and became the greatest orator of his time. Shirley thought that if she could finish the course in the barrel she might be able to play gilt-edge golf thereafter.

But she kept on losing—losing every thing but the friendly barrel, and when she missed the last putt on the eighteenth green she just threw down her clubs in despair and made a dash for the clubhouse as fast as the barrel would let her.

So ended the strip-golf match so far as the girls were concerned, but it was not the end for those club members who let it be played.

The Sound View Club was very indignant about it. At the next Board of Directors meeting the matter was taken up and two celebrated personages in the world of the theatre were suspended for sponsoring it. I have promised them never to print their names. If I broke the promise this book might sell into the hundred thousand class; but no, I will keep my word. They are too well known; they are my friends. But the "stunt" made Shirley Vernon famous.

CHAPTER XIII

Fixing the Audience

"I've been right on the job since nine this morning, governor, and the best I can do is to plant eighteen doubles. All the other ginks I ran into looked so hard up they'd probably sell the pasteboards for a ducat apiece at the cigar stores, so I thought I'd better bring back the rest of the punched stuff. Here it is."

And the suave young business representative of the great thatrical manager threw a bundle of tickets on the boss's desk.

The great manager sighed.

"Call up Freddie Frockcoat, the floor-walker at Stacey's department store," he directed. "The hour is late, but if we hurry, we can plant the rest of those balcony tickets with some of his girls."

The telephone bell rang and the great manager spoke into the transmitter.

"Hello, that you, Freddie? This is Hummer, of Blank and Hummer, up at the Paragon Theatre. I'm putting on a new show to-night—see? I've got a bundle of stuff for the balcony and I want it placed. I'll send it right down—about fifty doubles. Tell the girls not to go in pairs—it looks bad and the critics spot them at once when two shop girls sit together. Make each girl bring a young man—it dresses the house better. Tell them to pick out

MARY EATON

Once famous as a child actress, now popular musical comedy star.

escorts with strong horny hands who can make a lot of noise. That's all—good-bye."

Which explains how Mazie Sensen, clerking at the ribbon counter in the big department store, was able to invite her gentleman friend, "Kid" McLarnie, of the cigar store at 'Steenth Street and Third Avenue, to attend the Paragon Theatre that night and witness the first performance on any stage of "The Pet of the Parasites," the brand-new comic opera offered on an elaborate scale by Messrs. Blank and Hummer. Mazie and the Kid occupied choice seats in the second row of the balcony, and as the Kid pompously extended the pasteboards to the ticket taker at the door, he noticed with a certain degree of nervousness that someone had carelessly punched several large round holes in the tickets. The Kid and Mazie proceeded to their seats, not hearing the doorman's whispered expression of disgust to the business manager standing by:

"Two more punched tickets. Nothing but skulls to-night."

In the immediate vicinity of Mazie and the Kid were various employees of the big department store. Mazie counted at least twenty girls whom she recognized. Among them was Mr. Frockcoat himself, wearing his conventional afternoon costume, in the front row.

And do you envy Mazie, seeing a new show for nothing at a leading Broadway theatre in the great city of New York? Would you like to see most of the new shows, free of expense, and with the added privilege of taking your young man as your escort?

If so, apply at once for a position as sales-girl at a leading department store of New York, and you can have one of your dearest wishes gratified immediately.

The shop girls of New York's department stores see many theatrical offerings free of charge. They are the invited guests, the favored Daughters of the Drama, the Old Guard always called upon to save the day—or the night—when it is a question of "putting over" a new show, and the advance sale is poor.

The ruse of filling unsold seats with shop girls and their escorts from Third Avenue is but one of the many tricks employed in these days of fierce competition among theatrical managers. For many years the managers have picked their audiences with the same care they have exercised in selecting their actors, for the shrewd managers long ago realized that the reception accorded a new show depends entirely upon the persons who see it. It is now almost an impossibility for the average outsider to purchase a ticket for a first night performance in New York City, unless he is personally known to someone in authority at the playhouse making the production, and is known to be "friendly." Managers would sooner give away every seat in the house to a "friend" who could be relied upon to applaud at the right moment than to sell every seat to someone who might be cold, undemonstrative or even antagonistic.

All of which has led up to an amusing and absolutely unprecedented condition which prevails now whenever a new play or musical comedy is offered for a premiere in a first-class Broadway theatre. Not

for all, of course; many shows charge high prices the first night and sell out; but only in rare cases.

It is no unusual thing for a theatre having a normal money capacity of $4,000 a performance, opening with a new play to a packed house, with every seat taken and hundreds standing—to gross cash receipts of several hundred dollars. The second night, of course, if the manager has succeeded in "putting it over," the receipts from cash sales will come far nearer the capacity and henceforth the success of the offering is assured. More than half the time, however, the industrious "plugging" is either over-done or under-done, or else the show is so bad that no amount of "boosting" can save it. In that event the storehouse man calls on Saturday evening and removes a production costing $100,000 to the warehouse, where it is afterwards sold as junk or as second-hand material for a road show.

In "fixing" the house for the first night, the most essential thing is dressing the boxes. These are usually given to prominent actresses who will be sure to attend in full regalia with a complete retinue of followers, hangers-on, admirers and under-strappers. If any well-known society person orders a box, in advance, the order will probably be filled if the manager believes the parties ordering it are of enough importance to be mentioned in the society columns; but society people often arrive late, talk through the performance, and depart early, and managers prefer to give their boxes to star actresses who will look pretty, applaud everything, and stay to the very end for fear of incurring managerial displeasure.

Of the 600 seats in the orchestra of the average theatre, about eighty are taken out for the critics. These are always the aisle seats down front. These seats can do more damage to a new show than the rest of the house together. Critics nowadays are more human than they once were, and occasionally say kind things about a new production, but they, like the public, have become so "wise" that most managers regard it as a useless precaution to endeavor to "conciliate" them by meeting them in the lobby, calling them by their first names, and telling them funny stories.

Once the especial duty of the press-agents of the various theatres was to "fix the critics." This meant lying in wait for them, plucking them by the arm, inviting them outside to the nearest drinking establishment, and offering them cigars at the expense of the management.

One of the best stories told by James L. Ford, veteran newspaper man and critic, also an ex-press agent, deals with the time Frank McKee employed him as press agent at the old Savoy Theatre. The play was of doubtful value, but Mr. McKee instructed him to be sure and "fix the critics."

Mr. McKee, one of the most genial of managers, and well beloved during his day, had the idea that many managers entertained then that the critics could be "fixed." We of today know better now; but Mr. Ford also knew that in those days, if a play was a failure, the press agent was fired the next day, whereas if the play proved a success, the average manager would say:

JESSIE MADISON

Picturesque beauty in "Criss-Cross."

"Well, the show is a hit, so we don't need a press agent after Saturday night."

In either case, therefore, the press agent lost out. Mr. Ford, knowing this, drew one week's salary in advance, for preliminary work, and on the opening night he drew Mr. McKee aside, and explained that in order to "fix the critics" properly, he would like another week's salary in advance. Mr. McKee immediately gave him an order on the box office for $50—a princely salary then for a press agent—and told him to do his best to "fix the critics."

Having collected the fifty, Mr. Ford sauntered over to Alan Dale and said:

"Hope everything is all right with you at Bayside, Mr. Dale? And the chickens and the corn, all the crops O. K. eh?"

Mr. Dale nodded affably, they spoke together a few minutes about the weather, and then he returned to Mr. McKee.

"I've got Alan Dale fixed all right," he said. Mr. McKee smiled approvingly.

During the next intermission, Mr. Ford saw Acton Davies, Hillary Bell, and several other leading critics of that time. With all he exchanged the compliments of the season, spoke of the weather, offered each a cigar, and then reported back to Mr. McKee that the critics had been "fixed."

Next day a bombshell fell on the Savoy Theatre; never was a play so roasted. It was taken off Saturday night, but Mr. Ford consoled himself with the remark:

"Well, even if it had been a hit, I would have been fired anyhow."

But them days is gone now. The press-agents have over-done the stunt so much that now most critics flee the moment they sight a press-agent in the offing. As a matter of fact, most of the present generation of critics persistently avoid meeting press-agents. That is why, on a first night, many critics keep in the safe harbor of their orchestra seats, and never stroll in the lobby for fear of being held up by some importunate person who will try to "fix a critic."

This "fixing" is not limited to the press representative employed by the manager. Most of the actresses —and many chorus girls—employ their own press-agents. These are usually former newspaper men who are utilized because they were once on a speaking acquaintance with some city editor. Miss Gwendolyn Carruthers, one of the stately show girls of "The Pet of the Parasites," for instance, believes that it will advance her artistic and business interests if the newspapers can be persuaded to mention her name once in a while or print her picture occasionally. If her allowance from home is sufficient to permit the outlay, she engages some young man to act as her personal press representative. As Alan Dale, or Alexander Woollcott indiscreetly comes into view either entering or leaving the theatre, this personal press-agent—who knows the critic only by sight —will possibly edge up and whisper:

"Beg pardon, but if you'd let me, I'd like to tip you off to something you may want to know—big story, old chap. There's a show girl in this troupe—Gwendolyn Carruthers is her name on the programme, and she's the blonde in the purple dress

in the big Rose number of the first act—well, anyhow, she's the daughter of a Washington politician with a bunch of coin, is studying for grand opera, and working in the chorus just to get stage experience. Gets thirty-five a week here and pays twenty dollars a minute for vocal lessons. Thought maybe you'd like to mention her name—sorry to bother you, old chap, but a line of appreciation would help her immensely."

Mr. Dale, Mr. Woollcott and the other critics, being kind creatures, listen to such tomfoolery half a dozen times every night they go to a new show. If it isn't a press-agent, it is a bootlegger who knows a girl in the show and wants her mentioned, or some actor whose wife is playing a small part, or some absolute stranger who thinks he can influence dramatic criticism in favor of some person of his acquaintance.

Then there are the song publishers. Each publisher who may have brought out one of the twenty musical numbers in the opera, wants his song to be known as the song-hit of the show. He thereupon begs or buys—usually buys—a block of seats, and sends his entire office staff, from the telephone girl to the man who repairs the pianos—to "plug" for his particular number.

As there are often a dozen music publishers interested in a modern musical comedy, this means a genuine war of the applause-machines out front, and explains why harmless and inoffensive songs receive eight and nine encores on an opening night, only to be absolutely ignored the second night by a paying disinterested audience.

There are always enough critics, song publishers, and intimate friends of the management to fill two-thirds of the house downstairs. The remaining seats are not placed on public sale, but are "punched."

This habit of punching tickets dates back to nearly thirty years ago, when Annie Oakley was such a sure shot with the Buffalo Bill show that she could put holes in anything she aimed at. The first amusement enterprise I was ever associated with, was Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World. I had been a juvenile newspaper reporter, and was appointed as an assistant press agent to the celebrated Major John M. Burke of Col. Cody's show. Whenever we gave out free tickets, Major Burke wanted to identify them in such a way that they could not be redeemed at the ticket wagon for cash. The usual manner had been to cut off one corner of the ticket. This however made the free ticket—issued to newspaper men and owners of billboards—so conspicuous, that Major Burke wanted some other method devised to indicate that the ticket was absolutely free, issued to bearer, and could not be turned back for cash.

It may sound a little egotistical for me to say, but I suggested to Major Burke that we punch the tickets with several holes, and then, as a press stunt, since Annie Oakley was our star crack shot, second only to Col. Cody himself, call them "Annie Oakleys."

The suggestion was immediately adopted. To the best of my knowledge and belief the name of "Annie Oakley" was never applied to a punched free ticket, prior to the summer of 1897, when I, an adventurous

youth, was learning my first lessons about the show business from such eminent masters as Buffalo Bill and Major John M. Burke. The name of "Annie Oakley" was henceforth applied generally to all free tickets, punched, and is still in force to-day. Miss Oakley took it as a charming tribute to the fact that she could always shoot holes through anything, even a ticket. She died only the other day; but while her biographers credited her with the origin of the name as applied to free punched tickets, no one ever stated that the suggestion came from me and was put in force by Major Burke, who—bless his soul—claimed all the credit for the idea with Colonel Cody and the press. Her name will probably live forever as a synonym for punched free tickets—and I modestly admit that I originated the name.

After the theatre tickets are punched, then the discreet employees and friends of the management begin to place these tickets with certain theatre-goers who will be sure to boost.

Did you ever try to give away fifty theatre tickets? This is positively the limit that any one individual can dispose of gratuitously during one day if he exercises the least judgment or discrimination. He cannot give expensive orchestra stalls to his barber, his butcher, or the street car conductor. He cannot dispose of them to needy individuals who might sell them to the scalpers in the cigar stores. Most managers give explicit instructions that such punched tickets must never be given to actors.

Managers do not like to have actors in the audience at any opening night. In the first place, critics

who see and recognize them will instantly conclude that the professionals are in on "paper," because of the popular superstition that actors never have to pay to see a performance. Secondly, actors are often jealous of their associates on the stage who are fortunately on the salary list, and they leave the playhouse inclined to "roast" both their more fortunate associates and the play.

The person with fifty tickets to give away therefore has a hard time of it. He may give a few to certain actresses, who can be trusted to bring escorts who look like ready money. The janitor of an apartment house may be trusted to place five or six pairs with tenants. The telephone girl of the apartment house is surely able to place four seats. The lawyer who occasionally handles your legal business can legitimately place a dozen pairs among his associates. Then perhaps the distributor can place another half dozen pairs of seats by using the telephone. If he tries to be discreet and get nice people, fifty tickets is really a large number to take care of.

Most people refuse to accept balcony tickets. They must have downstairs seats or none. The bulk of the balcony therefore is given away to the big department stores. The floor-walkers pass from aisle to aisle, slipping the tickets covertly to the prettiest girls or the more important salesmen.

Occasionally however the girls in the department stores rebel at being ordered so many times a week to see certain plays. Only the other afternoon, there was an incipient rebellion—which was quickly suppressed—when a dozen of the girls at a leading

department store went on strike to protest being compelled to visit so many bad plays.

"We have to get to work every morning at 8:30," declared the ringleader of the rebellion. "And what good does it do us, wasting our beauty sleep, just to see a lot of rotten shows? And the shows are getting worse and worse. We believe the managers ought to give us half pay for over-time whenever they call upon us to see some of their terrible productions. I for one will not stand it any longer, being compelled to go and see these awful shows, lose my sleep and be bored in addition, just because the managers think they are doing us a compliment."

This little difficulty was finally straightened out when arrangements were made so that no girl in this particular store should be called upon to see a show for nothing, more than once a week. At the same time, there are rumors that the heads of departments and the floor-walkers, who have influence with the shop girls under their jurisdiction, are getting comfortable weekly stipends from certain managers, guaranteeing to deliver for a certain sum at least one hundred shop girls who will sit through a performance, good or bad, and applaud when so directed.

After seeing some of the shows produced on Broadway lately, can you blame the shop girls for going on strike? They should be paid, not half pay, but double pay, for being compelled to sit through many of the terrible shows.

But what of the gallery? Ah, listen. We will suppose there is a buxom prima donna who sings a catchy song. She wants the papers to say: "Even

the boys in the gallery took up the catchy refrain and whistled it for an encore."

These boys in the gallery work in squads. Any one of a half dozen super captains will furnish a squad of healthy, strong, energetic boys, numbering ten to fifty according to orders. The boys get their tickets free, and a dollar extra. The super captain gets fifty cents for each boy. For the sum of a hundred dollars a gang of husky whistling chaps can be planted in the gallery. Having had several rehearsals of the song they are to whistle, they know the music, and at the proper cue from the super captain, after the buxom prima donna has sung her tuneful refrain, the whistling boys start in on the chorus. Next day the critics—and you'd be surprised to know how often they fall for the same stunt—will say:

"Even the boys in the gallery took up the catchy refrain and whistled it for an encore."

What the prima donna does for her song, the friends and relatives of each principal do for their particular favorite. Thus a dozen friends will frantically applaud even the minor principals when they come on for the first time or make an exit after a scene or a song. When a blushing and nervous ingénue is greeted with a storm of applause on a first night, she possibly thinks it is real, and many a critic—even the case-hardened ones—will turn his programme to learn the identity of the young thing who "got such a hand." But if you should drop into the theatre the next night, you would see the same people come on without arousing any particular interest among the spectators.

And so the performance drags on. It may be good, and it may be bad, but there is just as much "acting" going on in front of the footlights as there is behind them. It is all designed to woo the great God Success, and make every one there think that the occasion is fraught with rare and rapturous joy. The feminine stars and their cohorts in the boxes dress the house prettily and applaud languidly; the press-agents and the ushers clap madly; the "boosters" in the orchestra chairs pound with their canes and make a noise; the shop girls and their escorts watch Freddie Frockcoat in the balcony and break loose at intervals when he turns and nods his head as a signal; the boys in the gallery whistle and stamp with their feet at the proper moments; and through it all a little band of hard-working, much-misunderstood, conscientious dramatic critics try to keep awake, to separate the chaff from the wheat and render a sane, dignified, sensible verdict upon whether the show is really good or bad.

Perhaps the manager will "put it over." If he does, you can reasonably decide that the show is a good one with much merit, for "putting it over" means attracting the paying public, not on the first night, but the second, third, and fourth nights. No amount of boosting will save a bad show, as the record of a hundred or more dire failures will prove.

The moral seems to be that the final arbiter of all things theatrical is the public. If you cannot attract the public, no amount of "boosting" will "put it over."

CHAPTER XIV

The Story of Fred Stone

Just to show that everything connected with the stage is not so luridy sensational and terribly wicked as possibly millions of people believe, let me call your attention to the career of Fred Stone, one of the best loved comedians on the American stage, whose musical companies have always been rated at the highest possible standard through Stone's efforts and those of his manager, Charles Dillingham.

Fred Stone is one of the most widely known men in public life in this country. Newspapers and magazines have devoted as much space to him, personally and professionally, as they have to some of the nation's biggest personalities. He numbers his friends by the thousands. Men, women, and children, rich and poor, know him intimately and admire him sincerely. He is one of the most highly respected actors of the American theatre, a reputation that public opinion bestowed upon him as a reward for the clean, wholesome entertainments he has offered during his twenty-five years on the stage.

That is one side of Fred Stone—the side the public knows, not from Stone himself but in spite of him—for the great comedian is the last man in the world to boast or give out the impression that he is or imagines himself to be different from the average

DOROTHY STONE

Brilliant daughter of Fred Stone, appearing in "Criss-Cross."

man. Many of the reports published about him are written in the third person and have to do with his work in the theatre, with almost nothing about his private life. They are the impressions and expressions of reporters measured at long distance and not by personal experience.

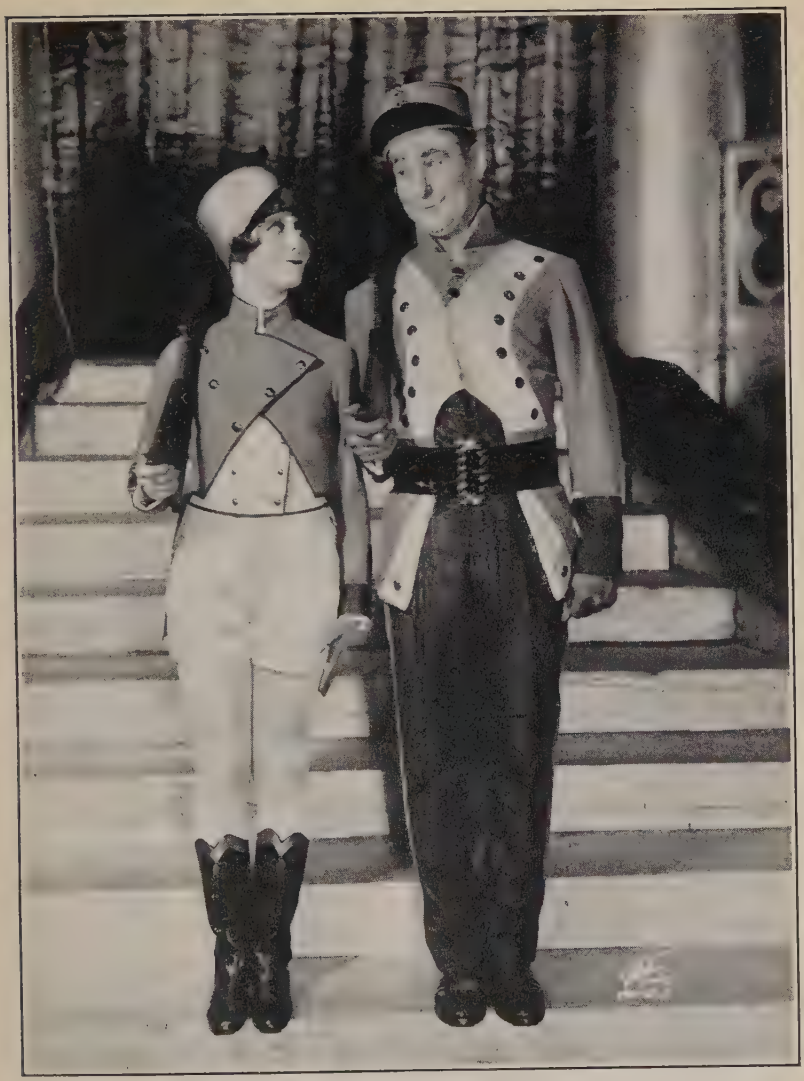
But the fact of the matter is, self-contradictory or paradoxical as it may be, that the creator of the scare-crow in "The Wizard of Oz," one of his most famous characterizations, is so thoroughly retiring that he probably has no larger personal acquaintance than the most humble citizen. Stone is not built for carrying dramatic things into his private life, or out of the theatre for self-aggrandizement. He cannot dramatize himself, and he shrinks from the attempts of his friends to dramatize him. Off stage he is much the same as any substantial business man —staid, simple, and modest, with a love for his home and family which is beautiful.

Born in a little town in Colorado, Fred Stone was taken in a prairie schooner by his parents to the wilderness town of Garden City, Kansas, so called because there was not a garden within a thousand miles. Every two years or so the family would move to another town and settle for a brief period. In this way, by the time Stone was ten years old, he had lived in Emporia, Wellington, Topeka, Atchinson, and Kansas City. It was in Kansas City that he saw a circus for the first time, being especially attracted by a man in a suit of red silk tights with silver spangles, who walked a tight rope.

Then and there was the beginning of Stone's career as an entertainer. He went home and induced his mother to sew spangles on his red flannel underwear and he practised tight-rope walking on his mother's clothesline in the back yard. A few months later he joined this very circus, then many miles away. There was no effort on the part of his parents to bring the runaway boy back home, and so he played with circuses and honkey-tonks for several years, finally drifting into vaudeville, or whatever it was termed in those days.

All this time he was rapidly developing into an athlete. It has been said of him that he never saw a feat of athletic skill or daring that he could not duplicate. For this reason, in every show in which he appears he is sure to surprise his audience with some novel exhibition of agility or daring. In all of his plays of recent years he has done something in each that has caused wonderment and thrills.

Skipping over the period between his circus days and vaudeville engagements, and starting again at the point where the famous team of Montgomery and Stone entered musical comedy, the new team of comedians landed on Broadway in a play called "The Girl From Up There," produced at the old Herald Square Theatre. They were a success over night, and were just as popular when the play was presented in London. It was with this production, "The Girl From Up There" that Fred Stone met for the first time the man with whose managerial capacities he was to be identified for almost a quarter of a century, Charles Dillingham. The play was pro-



FRED AND DOROTHY STONE
in their famous Soldier Dance in "Criss-Cross."

duced by the late Charles Frohman, and the business manager of the production was Charles Dillingham. Montgomery and Stone had been a tremendous success in vaudeville, but at that time it was considered almost unusual to recruit stars from vaudeville to the high-class musical comedy offerings of the day. Montgomery and Stone were practically the first big stars in vaudeville to invade the musical comedy field.

Following their great success in this production, they were offered an opportunity to star in a production entitled "The Wizard of Oz," a fairy extravaganza, which had a long run in Chicago, and later came to New York. In this production Mr. Stone created his never-to-be-forgotten rôle of the Straw Man, while Dave Montgomery appeared as the Tin Man. It should be explained here that Mr. Montgomery and Mr. Stone had formed a working alliance as a vaudeville team in their old circus days long before they came to Broadway.

During the season of "The Wizard of Oz," Mr. Stone was married to his leading woman, Miss Allene Crater, and he is one of the few actors who is able to boast that he still is happily married to the same wife, whom he married nearly twenty-five years ago. They have three children: Dorothy who is now 19, and who has been his leading ingenue since her debut in 1923 in "Stepping Stones" and is now playing opposite him in "Criss Cross"; Paula, a beautiful young girl now 18 years of age; and Carol, who is now nine years of age. Both of these younger daugh-

ters are being trained for a stage career under the careful supervision of their father and mother.

Following the run of "The Wizard of Oz," Montgomery and Stone were engaged by Charles Dillingham to play the principal rôles in an elaborate musical comedy, entitled "The Red Mill," written by Henry Blossom, with music by Victor Herbert. The comedians impersonated two Americans stranded in Europe. This production ran for three years in New York, Chicago and the other principal cities of the United States.

It was the first of a series of Charles Dillingham productions identified with Fred Stone, which has lasted until the present time and during more than twenty-one years, Mr. Dillingham and Fred Stone have never had a written contract. This fact is mentioned merely to show the confidence and friendship that exists between manager and artist, a condition unequalled in the American theatre of to-day.

The next attraction presented by Mr. Dillingham was "The Old Town," which also ran three years. This production had the distinction of being the first attraction presented at Charles Dillingham's Globe Theatre on the night of January 11, 1910. Mr. Dillingham was able to build the Globe Theatre almost entirely from the profits of the phenomenal run of "The Red Mill." "The Old Town" ran an entire season in New York and was presented for two years in other cities.

"The Old Town" was followed by "The Lady of the Slipper" which also enjoyed the usual Dillingham run of three seasons. Then came "Chin Chin." Mr.

Photo by White

MARGIE HIMES

Picturesque beauty in "Criss-Cross."

Montgomery died during the run of the latter play in Chicago, terminating a friendship and partnership which had lasted between Montgomery and Stone for a great many years.

The following season Mr. Stone appeared as a single star under Charles Dillingham's direction in "Jack-O'Lantern" which ran three years and this was followed by his production of "Tip Top," another Fred Stone show which ran the usual three seasons.

In October, 1923, at the Globe Theatre, Fred Stone made his first appearance in another Dillingham musical offering, "Stepping Stones," and introduced, for the first time, his beautiful daughter, Dorothy, at that time just sixteen years of age. Miss Dorothy was a sensation overnight. Her remarkable beauty, talent and her vocal gifts were amazing, but the most extraordinary feature of her performance was the fact that she was able to duplicate in every particular the unusual dancing steps of her distinguished father. It was obvious that she had been trained from infancy for a stage career and both Mr. Stone and Mrs. Stone were delighted at the ovation given Dorothy and the success she scored, a success which was repeated in every city where "Stepping Stones" was given for three consecutive seasons.

Now in "Criss Cross" the Stone family come once more to the front in a spectacular and beautiful production presented by Charles Dillingham, and introducing not only Mr. and Mrs. Stone in the leading rôles, but bringing forward Miss Dorothy, better and more accomplished than ever, as their leading

lady. Everyone who has seen the production of "Criss Cross" has commented upon the fact that Miss Dorothy almost steals the honors away from her distinguished father, but he is proud and happy to share in her success and does not hesitate for one moment to let her take the center of the stage whenever the situation makes it possible.

The home-life of the Stones, the love and affection existing between them, and the harmonious way in which Mr. and Mrs. Stone work for the best interests of their talented daughter, furnishes a striking and almost unparalleled illustration of domestic happiness upon the stage.

I have written the story of Fred Stone as the best possible refutation of those slanderers of the stage who are apparently willing to believe the worst about stage life. It may be a long shot from the beauty, simplicity, and charm of a Fred Stone show to the garish and often vulgar exhibition of undraped femininity which certainly does exist in some theatres; but that the public at large likes clean plays and clean comedy, would easily be demonstrated by statistics. The Fred Stone shows last three seasons; the other kind are lucky if they can last six months.

If the theatrical profession boasted of more stars with the high ideals of Fred Stone and if all theatrical marriages turned out as happily as his, there would be fewer headlines in the daily newspapers reflecting upon one of the most honored professions in the world —the stage and the theatre.

CHAPTER XV

Speaking of Angels

Angels are popularly supposed to have wings—and the angels of Broadway usually use their wings to fly away from the "Big Apple"—as Broadway is sometimes called—but only after their wings have been prettily singed by some fascinating cutie whom they "backed" financially in plays or musical productions to the tune of many thousands.

I estimate, as a result of my observations of the past few years while acting as manager or press representative for various attractions, that at least $5,000,000 a year is tossed into the gutter in New York alone by unreasoning compliance with the vain and futile ambitions of some of the fascinating beauties who decorate and adorn the modern stage and whose vanity leads them to wish to see their names in electric letters.

A hundred failures a year—that is my idea of the number of shows backed by angels that fail to win favor when offered to the public. Each show costs its angel not less then $30,000; the musical shows easily cost the backer at least $100,000, and many that I might mention have topped the list with a loss of $150,000 before the backer got cold feet and disappeared.

These shows, understand, are the shows backed by some butter and egg man, a cloak and suit manufac-

turer, or a wealthy man, as a favor to some feminine friend, or because he wanted to take a flier and see life behind the footlights, having the small town idea that the theatrical life is a round of gayety.

Some years ago, in "The Belle of New York," in which Edna May starred, the famous comedian, Dan Daly, spoke a line which well illustrates the reason many angels back shows. In this musical comedy, Daly appeared as a philanthropist who had backed a show, and when asked what were the privileges of an angel, he replied:

"A theatrical angel has the privileges of going behind the scenes whenever he wishes, and calling the manager by his first name."

The big established responsible managers, never permit angels to back their shows, for two reasons: first, outside backers who know nothing of the theatrical business always want to take the control of the enterprise from the manager, and secondly, the established managers who have brains enough to produce successes don't want to give up any of their profits to an outsider, and they don't need the outside money anyhow.

But there are always alert men who would walk a mile for an angel; and who will form little corporations and aid the angel in promoting his enterprises, especially if a girl figures in the arrangements.

Ninety per cent of the outside money furnished by angels, is invested in theatrical enterprises because of the fascination of some cutie who happens to meet a millionaire whose wife doesn't understand him, and who seeks sympathy and consolation in the night clubs

of Broadway, or playing around the front row of a musical comedy.

He meets a charmer, she flatters his vanity, tells of her ambition, her secret longings to be a star, her determination to win success on her own merits, and how the horrid managers discriminate against her because she lives at home with her mother and is not wild, like the other girls. She too could be a star, she always says, if she cared to pay the price. Etc., etc., until at last the big hearted butter-and-egg man, (as the girls call such a guy) becomes generous and offers to back the unknown girl gifted with real talent. He then becomes what the tabloid newspapers call—and the girls themselves secretly—"A Sugar Daddy."

If it is a chorus girl, the production planned will be a musical comedy, with the spot light on the cutie all the time; if an ambitious young dramatic actress, then a comedy or a drama. In either case, it is almost a certainty that the production will cost the Sugar Daddy a sweet sum.

A hundred failures a year—five or six million dollars—tossed into the whirlpool of Broadway and usually because of a pretty face or the desire of some man with money to invade what to him has always been a mysterious field for possible adventure.

Where does the money go to? The scenic artists get theirs; rents of theatres have to be paid; salaries of players must be protected with an Actors Equity bond so that the "angel" cannot leave the show flat if he quarrels with the star or changes his mind. Rehearsals, musicians, out of town tours for try-out

purposes; the money goes so swiftly that unless there is an immediate response from the box office, the "angel" soon is heavily involved.

Even in such a tragedy as an "angel" losing real money—and it is a tragedy with the players who are thrown out of work—there are amusing sidelights to every such production. The theatre is sure of its rental money in advance; it never takes a chance, the players are certain of some salary, but there are two business enterprises which collect heavy dough from every failure.

There is the concern that makes the advertising lobby and display frames for all the new shows. The bulk of this business is handled by the Stanley Frame Company, represented by an alert youth named Arthur Rosenfeld. When a new production is planned, it requires little effort on the part of his pursuasive tongue to get an order for $2500 for frames. When the show "busts" he buys them back for a trifle; and several weeks later the same frames—or others marvellously like them—blossom forth advertising another show which slips him another $2500—and then fails. The process can be repeated indefinitely; Rosenfeld is one man who welcomes a failure on Broadway because the failures have made his firm prosperous.

Another business enterprise that welcomes the advent of new shows, is the photographer who takes the flashlights. Every show must have flashlights—that is, scene pictures of the different settings and characters of the play. For twenty years the White Studio has had a monopoly on this business. The

firm has probably photographed every actor and actress of importance, and every chorus, on the stage in twenty years. Now it is obvious, as in the case of the frames, the more failures there are, the more new shows must take their places. Yet even though the White Studio makes a small fortune from every failure, it really makes greater profits from a success.

I mention these two items, merely to show that it is the easiest thing in the world to "shoot forty grand" as Broadway calls it, before admitting defeat. And somehow or other, these shows backed by "angels" almost invariably fail, for reasons which I will explain in a moment.

Not always is an angel lured into the White Lights by the whim of a girl, although Roy McCardell, the well known newspaper humorist and writer always insisted that "Ninety-five per cent of the sucker money is brought in by a skirt." On the other hand I have often seen angels rush to Broadway with a bankroll, searching for someone to accept their money as an investment, almost begging to be allowed to back a show. I have seen hundreds of angels come to Broadway in search of excitement—and of course with a hope of finding joy and pleasure in life behind the scenes.

I could mention dozens of them, but perhaps a few of the more interesting true stories of angels of recent years, will prove diverting. And the first story will tell of the ingenuity of two young men who met an angel with $200,000, who had the opportunity of their lives to make a fortune, and who tossed the dough

away before the angel ever had a chance to get the brass ring on the merry-go-round.

Emile Brugiere, San Francisco millionaire and dilletante, member of one of the best known families of the Golden Gate, wrote a musical comedy, words and music, and conceived the idea of presenting it on Broadway. He found managers cold to the idea of producing the work of a novice; but one evening he was interviewed by a newspaper reporter, keen, alert, ambitious—but knowing nothing of theatricals.

When the reporter learned that Mr. Brugiere was willing to back his own show, since no regular manager would, he immediately evinced keen interest, and mentioned that he had a friend, a well known manager, Heber MacDonald, who might be interested.

MacDonald, incidentally, was then—and is now—a press-agent and business manager for musical and operatic stars, but he knew nothing of the theatrical game. By the next afternoon, however, Mr. MacDonald was installed in a luxurious furnished suite, rented for the occasion, his name on the office door (hurriedly painted there) and the outer room was filled with actors and actresses seeking work unknowingly acting the rôle of supers to impress the millionaire with the importance of the office and of its manager.

The millionaire called by appointment to meet Mr. MacDonald, who was affable, suave, and golden-voiced. Certainly he would undertake the production of Mr. Brugiere's musical comedy; but let us see, he would require at least $100,000 to make the production, and also, since his old chum, the reporter recom-

Photo by White

FLORENCE McFADDEN

Another ex-chorus girl who won success in leeading roles.

mended the opera, he would have to engage him as press-agent.

Thus was the first step taken to produce "Baroness Fiddlesticks," starring Anna Fitzhugh (now known in grand opera as Anna Fitziu.) They started with a hundred thousand; they leased expensive offices in the Knickerbocker Theatre; hired a star cast; engaged the most beautiful chorus girls they could find; took the show on tour for several weeks on a special train, paying the expenses of everyone, and then leased the Casino Theatre for a long term under a heavy guarantee. And then—a "Bust."

The show was simply no good; Mr. Brugiere thought it magnificent, and backed it even though the public remained away. Miss Fitzhugh was lovely and sang well, but the music was atrocious. When he had lost $200,000, Mr. Brugiere closed his show, the sheriff took away the office furniture, Mr. MacDonald went back to his former business of representing operatic stars, and the reporter became a reporter again. Another angel had blown into Broadway and blown right out again.

One of the most spectacular angels who ever made good copy for the newspapers was Byron Chanler who loved to be called "the millionaire kid." Chanler was a young, unprepossessing youth from Boston who inherited over a million dollars from some relatives and started in to spend every cent of it on Broadway as fast as possible.

Although a familiar figure for months in the night cabarets and a host at many wonderful parties for chorus girls, he never backed a show until he met

the charming Grace La Rue, still one of our most successful stars. Chanler became infatuated and starred her in four shows until ultimately his devotion and his bankroll inspired Miss La Rue to accept him when he proposed marriage. Their romance and marriage furnished the newspapers with headlines for many days, finally culminating in a divorce suit when Miss La Rue decided that no matter how much money Chanler might have it was essential for her artistic career to find some manager with sufficient brains to pick a success.

Miss La Rue has since happily married Hale Hamilton, the well known actor while Chanler found consolation in the form of a matrimonal alliance with the beautiful Luella Gear, a show girl in one of his productions. Miss Gear recently divorced "the millionaire kid," but he is still a familiar figure on Broadway. Although he has probably spent most of his fortune, he is a genial host at many a midnight supper club and still loves to be called "the millionaire kid."

A picturesque angel who reached Broadway from Pittsburgh was Joseph D. Riter, the son of a Pittsburgh steel magnate. He inherited a vast sum of money and having nothing else to do chose as a profession the theatrical game. Although he owned and still maintains a winter home at Daytonia and a beautiful residence on the Champs Elysee in Paris, he found Broadway the most fascinating place in which to spend money.

Naturally, he became an angel.

He met Madison Corey, former general manager for Henry W. Savage and formed an alliance with

him. John D. Williams, formerly general manager for Charles Frohman, was about to produce a play and so Corey introduced the angel to Williams and the firm of Corey, Riter and Williams was organized. Nothing was wrong in the genesis of this affair for both Williams and Corey were well qualified by experience to succeed but the "angel" insisted upon telling them what to do because he paid the bills.

Riter lost one quarter of a million dollars on various productions before he decided that a yacht at Larchmont with congenial friends was more attractive than Broadway. He still shows at first nights however, and even threatens to come back into the game.

One of the most persistent angels who ever struck Broadway was Felix Isman, the well known New York and Philadelphia real estate broker. Isman loves the theatre and he loves the people of the stage. He has never been extravagant and has usually shown rare good judgment in backing shows, but on many occasions his judgment has proven wrong and he has lost far more than he ever made out of the show business. He is still however what the stars call "a live one" and even to-day if you take him the proper kind of a play and it looks good to him, he is just as likely as not to say, "All right, count me in for fifty thousand."

Another angel of the old regime was the celebrated "Freddie" Gebhart, the famous Fifth Avenue beau, and remembered in the annals of old Broadway as the man who stole the beautiful Drina de Wolfe away from Colonel John Jacob Astor (who was lost on the "Titanic"). Gebhart, who died a few years ago,

having lost most of his fortune, belonged to the coterie of bright spirits who surrounded Stanford White in the heyday of that wonderful night life which was swept away in the general investigation following the shooting of White by Harry Thaw.

At that time, one of the most famous stage beauties of Broadway was Drina de Wolfe. Her diamonds and jewels were the envy of her associates. It so happened I was business manager of the company in which she appeared. I remember once taking to her in her dressing room, a little jewel box which had just arrived at the theatre from Cartier's. She opened the box in my presence and showed me a pear shaped diamond that seemed an inch and a quarter long, with a square emerald in the pendant chain. "This is from Colonel Astor," she whispered to me confidentially. "He does not want me to go out to supper to-night with Freddie Gebhart."

Gebhart did not take her to supper that night, but soon afterward Drina was starred in a play called "The Clean Slate" and once more I was her business manager. Gebhart lost at least seventy thousand dollars on this alone, but he was now the favored admirer of the beautiful Drina, and his social triumph in Clubland was unparalleled.

Two years afterward I met Drina walking on Broadway in the rain going to her rehearsal. She had lost everything, the pear shaped diamond had been sold and she said she was living now only for her art. She could not afford taxis but was determined to win success as an actress. After playing a whole season on Broadway in one of Hall Caine's melo-

dramas, she went to London on a vacation, and married a wealthy Spaniard, a banker from Seville. The last report I heard from her only a few months ago was that she is one of the social leaders in Spain, and her husband one of the richest bankers of Seville.

A prominent figure in the Broadway life of recent years has been that of Robert Mackaye, said to be a relative of Clarence Mackay, although he spells the name a trifle differently. "Bob" Mackaye came forward prominently as an angel when he backed Valaska Suratt in the musical comedy, "The Red Rose" and dropped a quarter of a million dollars on this and other productions. I was business manager for Miss Suratt on this occasion and so I know personally of the facts I now write. Miss Suratt is an exceptional genius, of charming personality and a striking beauty of an odd type which she accentuates by the way in which she wears her hair. It was my custom every night at the Globe Theatre to call on Miss Suratt in her dressing room before each performance and so I learned to know Mackaye well, a very affable and courteous gentleman. One evening when I knocked at the dressing room door, he was there. Miss Suratt told me to come in as she had a good story for me.

"Bobby has just been over to see his aunt on Park Avenue," she said, "and what do you think the aunt had the nerve to suggest? She told Bobby she would give him a million dollars in cash if he promised to give me up and stop backing the show. And what do you think Bobby said to her? Tell Mr. Page what you told your aunt, Bobby."

Mr. Mackaye smiled and said proudly:

"I told my aunt I could go into Wall Street any day and make a million dollars—but there is only one Valaska Suratt."

CHAPTER XVI

Still Speaking of Angels

Angels come and angels go and they keep on coming forever, I presume they will keep on even as Tennyson's "Brook."

Only the other day, in the city court, Florence Reed, one of our most prominent and talented actresses, appeared to prosecute some unknown magnate who had backed her show, "Ashes" and then defaulted owing her something like six thousand dollars.

Two months previously, George Backer—what a name for an angel—struck Broadway, opened beautiful offices on Fifth Avenue and made arrangements to back half a dozen plays. His first venture was "Great Music" which ran four weeks and cost him eighty thousand dollars. Not a bit discouraged, he is still planning new productions on Broadway and he is the latest spectacular "angel" to bring outside money in the show business.

Several years ago I met another "angel," and at first I thought he was a different type but events proved that all angels' minds work in the same channel.

I had written a play dealing with prohibition called "The Bootleggers." Charles Capehart, head of a big advertising corporation in New York was so antagonistic to the principles of prohibition, that he

agreed to produce and back the show if I would strengthen in my play the arguments against prohibition.

Mr. Capehart, it should be explained, had specialized in theatrical advertising, and for years had enjoyed an exclusive contract to handle all Shubert advertising. His principal and practically his only competitor in the same line is the firm of J. P. Muller and Company, handling all of the Erlanger and syndicate advertising, and motion picture accounts. Mr. Muller has always devoted his entire time to his own business; the wise and experienced Broadwayite, Mr. Capehart, took a "flier"—but to get on with the story:

When Capehart and I called on Lee Shubert to get a theatre in which to produce the play, Shubert looked at Capehart in amazement and said:

"Great Scott, you have been handling advertisements for theatrical shows for thirty years. You have lost thousands of dollars with unpaid advertising bills for shows that failed. Knowing all this, you are still going to put money in the show business? Wonders never cease."

However, Capehart proved a game angel. He produced "The Bootleggers" in the best possible style with the best cast he could engage. The only unfortunate feature connected with the enterprise is that during the try-out week on tour, before coming into New York, he was unable to restrain the impulse which comes to all backers and which leads them to assume direction of an enterprise in the management of which they are inexperienced.

For instance, although I was the author of the play and he was only the backer, he started in to rewrite the play several days before it was produced in New York. I protested in vain against these changes, but his answer was always the same:

"I am paying the bills and I will do as I please."

What was the result? The show did not have a chance. No show has a chance the moment the angel takes charge. And so Capehart had the pleasure of paying losses of something like forty-two thousand dollars.

Undeterred with this catastrophe, however, he went into the ring again the very next season, produced a musical comedy called "The Chiffon Girl," starring Eleanor Painter, and dropped seventy-five thousand dollars more.

I saw him the other day, smiling and debonair as usual, and he mentioned casually that he thought he might put on another show if he could find a play that he liked. Here is a chance for aspiring playwrights to meet an angel: If you have a play you think is good send it to Charles Capehart, Times Building, New York.

Another personal instance in which I dealt directly with an "angel," and therefore speak with accuracy, happened last spring. I had adapted a French comedy which was extremely risque in Paris; it needed just the proper retouching to preserve its charm and piquancy and yet there were certain features that had to be eliminated. The story was, to speak frankly, an episode in the life of a fascinating but immoral French girl.

One day a middle-aged gentleman called on me with a letter of introduction from a mutual friend. The gentleman, a retired physician, had recently inherited quite a sum of money, and as he was now independently wealthy, and had always loved the theatre, he wished me to advise him as to how to invest his inheritance.

It was but human nature to let him read my adaptation of the French comedy. He appeared delighted with it, closed contracts for its immediate production, opened offices, engaged a business manager at my suggestion, hired a company, and everything seemed rosy until the first rehearsal.

Then, ignoring entirely the etiquette of the stage —which is that the director conducting rehearsals is in absolute charge, and also that changes in the play can be made only with the author's consent—he moved his chair to the center of the stage, sat with the director, and started in to direct the rehearsal, thereby antagonizing the director and throwing the players into a state of panic.

I led the worthy gentleman to one side, and said: "If you were about to perform an operation in your operating room, and I intruded, trying to tell you how to do it, what would you say?"

He declared it was not a parallel case at all; that he had studied the drama for years and that he intended to become a great producing manager by starting in from the bottom and learning everything.

It was no use to argue with him. He would promise one day never to come to rehearsals; but the next day he would be back. The fact that he usually

MARGOT KELLY

Formerly of musical comedy, now a dramatic star.

brought a check made him welcome with the players, but his attempts to re-write the play and direct rehearsals, led to inevitable misfortune. When he finally insisted that since he paid the bills, he could do as he pleased, I had no other recourse than to try and save the play by serving him with an injunction which closed the show on the road.

Later he made arrangements with me whereby I would agree to certain changes. He then altered the play entirely, making the bad French woman a good girl—a Camille who reformed and married Armand —and the goose was killed.

That is why the comedy "I. O. U. One Woman" never reached New York and why the angel lost forty thousand dollars.

* * * *

"The best angel who ever struck Broadway" was Michael Sellers Largey, who at the time his money-tossing chronicle begins, was a twenty-one-year-old university student. His father was old "Pat" Largey, famous Montana speculator and mine discoverer, and head of several large corporations in Butte, Montana. As president of the State Savings Bank and of various lumber, powder and hardware companies, he was a power and his children were naturally of high social importance in Butte.

Sellers Largey and his brother Creighton, like all human young fellows, went about a bit. Both loved the theatre, so when, one week, the then celebrated Anna Held hit Butte in "Miss Innocence," a "daring" musical show—for those days—the Largey boys were in Row A, taking in all the proceedings.

When the final curtain fell, they were at the stage door, and the next half hour found them ensconced in a restaurant opposite two extremely attractive girls from the company. One was Ursula March, a dancer; the other a demure, well-bred little person, Nena Blake. The party was perfectly correct, but it lasted so long that Miss Blake and Miss March missed the special train which was taking the "Miss Innocence" cast out of town that night. Sellers hired a special train and took the girls to the next stand. gilt-edged existence.

At that point the paths of destiny marked out for Sellers and Creighton branched off sharply. Creighton wooed and won Ursula March; they went back to Butte, entered society, bought Senator Clark's magnificent home, and settled down to a routine, but

Not so with Sellers. He importuned Miss Blake to marry him, but she was ambitious. She wanted Broadway and the chances for fame which it offered. She was sweet and polite, but firm. As a Westerner's wife, she would be only, after all, a fireside companion. In New York (who knows?) she might grow to the stature of a great star.

I knew every principal in this true-life story well, and at this juncture I want to say that Nena Blake was one of the finest and most charming girls who ever lived. She had rare, flower-like beauty. She had magnetism and perfect manners and true culture and belief in herself. It was not her fault, but that of Providence, that all these gifts were not allied to the flame of genius. For on the stage, unfortu-

nately, her talent never quite achieved the undying fire which she longed to possess and express.

But, in her shy, quiet way, she was uniquely unforgettable. I read with a sigh of candid sorrow, the other day, of her death in the metropolis which she so dearly loved. Who could blame her for the gentle delusion that she was a potential Bernhardt—or for the fact that Sellers Largey fell so madly in love with her that he squandered a million dollars in trying to make her a star? Not I, for one.

Largey went at the business of "angel" with spendthrift speed. He backed show after show, Miss Blake always being either "in" or "with" on the billing. Since her initial training had been in musical comedy, his first inspiration was to produce such a piece. His opening gun of this sort was "Kafoozelem."

Aside from its terrible title, there is only one fact about "Kafoozelem" that sticks in my memory. One is the vision of a slender, nymph-like chorus girl, barely more than a child, with a delicious pout on her lips and clouds of fluffy hair. Her name was Mae Murray, and to-day she, who was a mere "pony" in a production featuring an "angel's" synthetic star, is among the "Big Ten" of the great movie idols.

Largey was new at the game, and didn't realize this—until the show subsided with a sickening crash. Undeterred by one flop, he immediately plunged into preparations for another Nena Blake starring vehicle. This was "The Geezer of Geck." The comedian, Dave Lewis, was engaged as a special attraction. But even that well-known laugh-getter

(cast as a Turkish potentate with a harem) wouldn't save the occasion. Another crash, and "The Geezer" was no more.

Largey was game—I must hand him that. Instead of moaning and cursing, he went right along with plans for another production which "couldn't fail to put the star over *this* time." Meanwhile he was, of course, thousands and thousands of dollars in the hole, although still far from broke.

He put on "Loveland." It refused to stay put. Only the tickets in the box-office did that. Then, with "Loveland" and unloved memory, there followed "Comin' Through the Rye." This, too, went the way of all the other Largey musical comedies to swift oblivion.

Next, he backed "The Land of Nod" in which the veteran fun maker, Frank Lalor, cavorted divertingly—but it failed. Miss Blake continued on gold-faced type in the cast-roster. She was alluring-looking, agreeable, truly adorable. Yet she still hadn't the stellar calibre. "The Land of Nod" gave a gasp—and crumbled.

Sellars Largey, with a dent in his pocketbook, but a stiff upper lip, decided to abandon musical shows, which are always a costly proposition and, even when successful, hideously expensive because of overhead. He turned his gaze toward the "Legitimate" and, with the ashes of five dearly-bought song-and-girl experiments still smouldering, determined to star Miss Blake in straight comedies and dramas.

He plunged to the extent of four productions: "Told in the Hills," a "heart-interest" play; "The

Senator's Vindication" (you can almost guess the plot of that one); "Rose Valley," a "sweet but strong" piece, and "The Mills of the Gods," which are legendarily supposed to grind slowly, but which, in this case, ground with lightning speed. Indeed, they ground the last spark of "angelic" ambition out of Largey and most of his money. He had literally "shot his roll."

On these nine unhappy ventures I would roughly estimate that he lost a million dollars.

Largey abandoned the show game; went back to Butte; enlisted as an ambulance-driver in the World War; was sent to France. After the signing of the Armistice, he worked his way to America on a tramp steamer—no longer the "millionaire kid," but a common seaman!

The last I heard of him, he was working as a clerk in a San Francisco haberdashery, but still a light-hearted, gay and debonair chap who will always live in theatrical history as the best "angel" who ever struck Broadway.

He threw away a million dollars because he sincerely loved a very beautiful girl whom he tried to make a star.

His brother, Creighton Largey, on the other hand, married the beautiful show girl Ursula March, who had sense enough to keep him from investing his money in the show business and who now lives, with him, independently wealthy in a very magnificent home on the outskirts of Seattle.

There, you have the two contrasts—two brothers each inheriting more than a million dollars. One

choosing the white lights of Broadway and scattering his gold, like the prodigal son of old Jerusalem; the other was saved from a similar fate by the brains and intellect of a girl who began in the chorus of a Chicago musical comedy and who is, to-day, one of the leaders of society in a Western city, noted for her charities and with the love of the theatre still inherent in her disposition, always the first to entertain visiting Thespians who may happen to play Seattle on their travels.

Space makes it impossible to record the doings and activities of all the angels who have struck Broadway, but while on the subject of angels, let me mention one whose name probably has never been printed in such a connection before, yet one whose love for the profession cost him a small fortune.

William A. Pinkerton, the famous detective whose untimely death brought mourning to thousands, was one of the greatest friends of the show business and show people ever known.

Making his headquarters in Chicago, always visiting the Cohan Grand Opera House every night promptly at nine o'clock and meeting there his old cronies, Lou Housman and Harry Ridings (both theatrical managers); Ashton Stevens, well-known dramatic critic of Chicago, and Jack Lait, then on a Chicago paper, dear old "Pink" would inquire whether or not any show, actor or actress was in distress.

Every show that was ever stranded in Chicago in recent years, within my memory, found a friend in William A. Pinkerton. His charities were never

known to the public, but many an actor and many a manager will testify to his generosity in aiding anyone in financial difficulties.

It was his custom in such an emergency to advance whatever money was necessary and merely take an I. O. U. If the manager or the actor ever prospered sufficiently to repay the sum, well and good. If not, dear old "Pink" never wrote a line of protest or made a request for the return of the money. When his strong box was opened after his death, I venture to say, the executors found autographs on slips of paper with many famous names representing large sums of money.

Everyone who ever met Pinkerton will realize that if ever there was a friend of the theatre who deserved to be called "an angel on earth" it was "Pink."

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Gest and Velour

I have already written much of Morris Gest, but here are several anecdotes which are perhaps worth the telling.

Every time you see a photograph of Mr. Gest nowadays you see him wearing a black velour hat.

Once upon a time, Mr. Gest wore Panama hats in summer and pearl grey derby hats in winter, but the newspapers have made so much of his velour hats that they are now almost as famous as "The Miracle."

In London a year ago when Adolph Zukor registered at the Savoy Hotel, and Mr. Gest was immediately behind him—the clerk inadvertently made a mistake and registered as follows:

Adolph Zukor, and Valet.

Morris Gest, and Velour.

Contrary to general belief, Mr. Gest does not buy his velour hats in Europe. He bought his first velour hat in Chicago in the fall of 1911. I have a photograph of him taken that summer that shows him wearing a Panama hat. I also have an earlier photograph, taken a year before, which shows him wearing a pearl grey derby.

Inasmuch as I was instrumental in introducing Mr. Gest to velour hats, I feel that the history of

GENE BUCK

Co-author of many "Follies," now an independent producing manager.

this famous chapeau should be published so that the records may be kept clear for future historians.

I was in Chicago at the time in advance of one of Charles Dillingham's productions starring John Barrymore. In a hat store under the Hotel Sherman, Barrymore and I saw some beautiful Austrian velour hats. We each purchased one for the large sum—in those days—of eight dollars.

An hour later I was reprimanded for my extravagance by Percy Hammond, then dramatic critic on the Chicago *Tribune*. Mr. Hammond admired the velour hat exceedingly, and with becoming modesty put it upon his own shapely dome so that he might inspect himself in the mirror wearing an eight-dollar velour hat. This was really a great deal of money for an advance agent in those days to waste upon a hat. Mr. Hammond said so and regretted exceedingly that while he liked it immensely and it fitted him perfectly, he could not afford to pay that much money himself.

Two days later Morris Gest arrived in Chicago with the first Russian ballet—he was exploiting the Russian stuff even in those days, and it is on record that he preceded the Diaghileff ballet by four years. He also admired the black velour hat which I was so proudly wearing, and at his request I led him to the store that he might purchase its duplicate, which he did.

Quite casually and rather ostentatiously I explained that my chapeau had already won a favorable notice from such an eminent dramatic and artistic critic as Percy Hammond and that Mr. Ham-

mond regretted his inability to find eight "bucks" with which to purchase one for himself. Mr. Gest, always magnanimous, on finding upon inquiry that my hat exactly fitted Mr. Hammond, ordered one of the same size and sent it to Mr. Hammond at the *Tribune* office with his compliments. It was one of those generous whims which managers sometimes indulge in with critics.

When I was a dramatic critic once, A. H. Woods generously offered to send me a beautiful Swiss watch, but he never did. But that has nothing to do with this story.

Mr. Hammond, receiving the hat, wore it in the *Tribune* office, eliciting great admiration and enthusiastic approval from all. Then he promptly wrote out a check for eight dollars which he mailed to Mr. Gest in payment for the hat.

Mr. Gest, shocked and surprised that his generous action had been misinterpreted, promptly wrote Mr. Hammond, returning the check and expressing the hope that Mr. Hammond would keep the hat anyway, and added that if he insisted on paying eight dollars to anyone rather than accept the hat for nothing, would he give the money to his favorite charity? Mr. Hammond tore up the check and returned the hat to Mr. Gest. The hat was far too large for Mr. Gest to wear himself, and he was greatly perplexed that his beautiful gesture had been so misunderstood as to be regarded as an effort to get a good notice for his show.

Incidentally Mr. Hammond gave the Russian Ballet a wonderful column of enthusiastic approval,

which proved his absolute independence as a critic—a reputation he has always enjoyed and still does now as the critic of the New York *Herald-Tribune*. But as a dramatic critic, he is very sensitive. Perhaps he feared the Greeks bearing gifts. Mr. Gest, not being a Greek, but simply an over-enthusiastic and unselfish Russian, meant only to do a kind deed and not to avert a naughty word.

What became of the hat? I think Mr. Gest finally gave it to the hotel porter.

This little incident temporarily destroyed the entente cordiale which had always existed between the manager and the critic and it required several years before mutual apologies and explanations led to a love feast which exists to-day, so that Mr. Gest is now Mr. Hammond's favorite manager, and Mr. Hammond is now Mr. Gest's favorite critic.

Since his velour hat created such a discussion that all of the newspaper men in Chicago talked of the incident for years, Mr. Gest has continued to wear the same type velour hat so they will keep on talking. I think, secretly, he remembers the time when he worked for Oscar Hammerstein, and the newspaper jokesters printed columns and columns about the funny hat that Hammerstein used to wear.

And that, children, is the story of how Mr. Gest first began to wear velour hats and why I think he continues to do so. He believes in always giving "the boys" something to write about. It is only an additional instance of the wonderful showmanship Mr. Gest has always exhibited and which has made him an internationally known personality.

Talking about hats and Morris Gest, this story would scarcely be complete unless I mentioned his most celebrated creation, the "bird cage hat."

At that time, the morality play, "Experience," was being presented on Broadway by Mr. Gest and his partners, F. Ray Comstock and William Elliott. This was a great big girl show given in the guise of a morality play, with gorgeous creatures impersonating such personages as Beauty, Slander, Jealousy, Passion, Intoxication, Fashion, and dozens of others. The same idea has recently been presented in a new form by Robert H. McLaughlin, the author of the "Decameron Nights" which was a sensation in London at the famous old Drury Lane Theatre and established him at once as one of America's leading playwrights. Mr. McLaughlin's play is said to have been written before "Experience" was produced, and to avoid comparisons the production of "The Pearl of Great Price" was held back nearly ten years by Al Woods.

But to return to Fashion; the rôle in "Experience" was played by the beautiful Miss "Toodles" Ryan, famous as a front-page feature because of a sensational breach of promise suit. Anything she did made "news." She was in the public eye; the "Peaches" Browning of her day. And so came "the bird cage hat."

Mr. Gest, as the producer of "Experience," wanted to hit upon some idea that would make "Toodles" break into the front page as a member of the cast of "Experience."

What more likely therefore than to have "Fashion" of the stage play introduce a new fashion on Fifth Avenue.

The "bird cage hat" was invented by Mr. Gest; a costumer was employed to create a hat for "Toodles" that would have a triangular-shaped wire bird cage on its top, the entire framework being covered with wires. Inside the hat we placed a real live canary swinging on a little bar.

Then we took "Toodles" in a taxicab over to Fifth Avenue, and in front of the Cathedral at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning when the Easter parade was beginning we turned her loose, bird cage hat and all.

"Toodles" started to stroll down Fifth Avenue and a curious crowd immediately followed to watch the antics of "Toodles" and the bird in the cage. All went well for several blocks and dozens of cameras clicked until "Toodles" gave a sudden shriek. Mr. Gest and I were close behind her when she summoned a taxicab. The canary was chirping with happiness over being out in the golden sunlight of an Easter morning.

But unfortunately the canary was not house broken, or should I say—"hat broken." Certain reminders of its existence gradually dawned upon "Toodles" and with a shriek of dismay she leaped into the taxicab, tore off the bird cage hat and cried, "Home, James," to the chauffeur.

But though little damage was done by the poor little canary, poor "Toodles" was indignant at the desecration to her beauty. Mr. Gest and I had our

consolation next day in seeing in the newspapers many photographs of the remarkable new fashion inaugurated by the "Fashion" of "Experience."

And that's another "hat" story about Mr. Gest, but since he has never been known to "high hat" anyone I hope he will not mind the telling of this truthful narrative.

MARION DAVIES

Famous stage beauty who became brilliant screen star.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Story of Marion Davies

Magazine and tabloid editors, as I have already stated, have done much to misrepresent the stage, but one evil which should be corrected at once is the habit of some publications of printing alleged stories supposedly written by celebrities, which are really cooked up in a newspaper office and faked for publication. "Ghost writers," the authors are called in the newspaper offices.

Among the reforms needed in the theatrical and motion picture world is a strict law providing heavy penalties for forging the name of a celebrity to an alleged "story of my life," written by Amy Applesauce Priscilla Poppycock. The thing has been overdone to such an extreme now that it is a positive offense to one's intelligence to pick up a magazine and read the story of some one's life, so-called, signed with the name of a star. Usually the star has nothing to say of importance; yet now and then mistakes creep in which expose the fraud.

The most inane of the so-called Confessions is the recent Marion Davies so-called story of her life, telling how she went on the stage. No one who knows Marion will ever fancy for one moment that the amateurish, badly written idiotic balderdash ever came from her pen, or was even dictated by her. She is

a charming, sincere, ambitious young woman, with great talent which has not yet attained its zenith; I know now that she never sanctioned such rubbish, and since she made her début on the stage in a production of which I was business manager, I want to revise the false narrative and tell the truth.

The fact that one of the hack writers on a morning paper turned this story out by machinery, without rhyme or reason, is apparent to anyone who knows Marion and is familiar with the incidents of her life.

Marion Davies made her first appearance on any stage with Charles Dillingham's production of "Betty." Not once does the author of her romance mention either this, nor her appearance later with the Fred Stone show. Not once does he mention the time she played opposite Justine Johnston in "Oh Boy" at the Princess Theatre under the Elliott, Comstock and Gest management. As I happened to be the very first press representative to exploit Miss Davies—I am able to speak of personal knowledge.

Miss Davies, a slip of a girl about fifteen years old, was brought into the Dillingham offices by her sister, Reina Davies. Mr. Dillingham promptly engaged her for "Betty," the first musical show ever produced in this country by "Teddy" Royce. Ask Royce—he knows. He trained her first as a dancer. Mr. Dillingham was charmed with her natural beauty and cute ways and next season gave her a rôle in the Fred Stone show. Then she went to "Oh Boy," and had the memorable row with Justine Johnston, which is another story. And after that, in 1917, she went

to the "Follies," the Century Roof and then into pictures. She is now one of the biggest stars of the screen world—and never denies she played in a musical chorus.

The real story of the row between Miss Davies and Miss Johnston has never been published. Miss Johnston, then playing under the Comstock & Gest management with "Oh Boy," was persuaded by Lee Shubert to become hostess of the Little Club, under the Forty-fourth Street Theatre. This was the first of the night clubs and the late Toxen Worm, as press representative for the Shuberts, took charge of the publicity. Worm was a wonderful genius, and a great personal friend of mine. He had a great sense of humor when writing about others—but regarding himself he had no sense of humor whatever. In fact, he was extremely "touchy" on personal matters, easily offended, and unfortunately made many enemies for this reason.

Worm conceived the idea of charging an admission fee to the Justine Johnston Little Club of fifty dollars—an unheard-of thing in 1916. A few rich admirers actually did send in checks, and the Little Club, packed every night, seemed on the road to prosperity. In reality the bulk of the patronage at first was recruited from dozens of chorus girls in Shubert shows, who were given free passes for two, in the hope that each girl would bring a "boy friend"—which most of them did.

Miss Davies was playing opposite Miss Johnston in "Oh Boy," and the two girls, great personal

friends, were easily the raging beauties of the town. I was press representative of "Oh Boy."

One night I suggested to Miss Davies that, as an advertising stunt, she should start a rival supper club in the basement of the Princess Theatre, call it the Marion Davies Petit Souper Club, and charge an entrance fee of—$100. Furthermore, to show the purity of the atmosphere and the charm of its hostess, I announced that Miss Davies would serve nothing stronger than milk. This apparent opposition, I explained, would show friendly rivalry between two famous beauties, and the newspapers would surely write it up.

Then came the bombshell. Worm issued a statement to the newspapers denouncing Miss Davies for appropriating Miss Johnston's idea; he accused me of being an "imitator"; announced that the Little Club was playing to capacity; and that Miss Johnston had originated a new idea which others had no right to copy; he even threatened suit for damages.

As a reply to his claim of playing to capacity, I sent him a bunch of fifty passes for the Little Club which he himself had sent to the stage manager of "The Wanderer," asking him to distribute them among the girls, in the hope they would bring escorts to pack the Little Club that night. I collected them from the stage manager as evidence.

The whole affair started in fun; Miss Davies never intended to open a supper club, but Worm and the Shuberts thought she did and feared her opposition. That night Justine refused to appear in "Oh Boy" unless I was dismissed, and when William Elliott,

one of the producers, sent her a check for $100 for her week's salary, announcing that her contract had been cancelled, Miss Johnston returned the check, saying in a curt note:

"You cannot dismiss me; I resigned on Tuesday; I return your check for $100; please use it to buy one membership in the Marion Davies Petit Souper Club. It is probably the only money she will ever get as a subscription for her club."

From an attempted pleasantry arose a quarrel between these two beauties which lasted for five years. It is now ended, I am glad to say.

Justine Johnston has won fame as an actress and is happily married to Walter Wanger, one of the chief executives of the Famous Players Lasky Corporation, and the almost constant companion of Mr. Lasky. Marion Davies had a brilliant stage career, went into the movies and is to-day one of the most successful stars in the film world. And yet it seems only yesterday that they were both playing in the chorus of "Oh Boy" over at the Princess Theatre.

In connection with the so-called "Life of Marion Davies" I would like to add two interesting stories. One illustrates her generosity and probably accounts for the fake biography which she herself denounces, and the other illustrates her sense of humor.

While Miss Davies was appearing at the Cosmopolitan studios two years ago, a young newspaper woman approached her with a request for an article of her adventures on stage and screen.

"I can get fifty dollars for the article," said the young writer.

Miss Davies, always sympathetic, told the girl to go ahead and get the fifty.

The result, of course, is the vapid, inane and senseless drivel which was peddled out as though it had been written by Miss Davies. One of her close relatives assures me that she never even read the rot; she never saw the manuscript; but she did sign (in a moment of generosity to help a newspaper woman get fifty dollars) a foolish authorization for the newspaper woman to print what she believed would be the average sort of press matter written about most screen artists, dealing with episodes in her life.

The result—a series of articles purporting to be by her, which she disavowed, which she tried to stop and which—to those who do not understand—make Miss Davies appear anything but the charming, lovely, sincere and earnest artist she really is.

The second story concerns Miss Davies' first appearance on the stage as a chorus girl in Charles Dillingham's production of "Betty." Mr. Dillingham picked her out to do three verses of a special number. Marion rehearsed only fairly well; with regret Mr. Dillingham cut the song down to two verses. Still Miss Davies was so overcome with stage fright that she could not sing effectively; finally, in cutting it down to only one verse, Mr. Dillingham begged Marion to try and put the verse over.

"I'll try, Mr. D-d-d-Dillingham," she said, shaking, and with the slight stuttering which has always made her especially charming. "B-b-b-but remember I'm no T-t-t-Tetrazzini."

INA CLAIRE

Formerly in musical comedy, now an immensely popular dramatic star.

CHAPTER XIX

Of the Making of Stars

If in this book of memoirs, I have seemed to dwell at great length upon the more frivolous side of things theatrical, especially of anecdotes of the chorus, it is only because from the chorus of today come the stars of to-morrow. The chorus is the training school of the theatre. For those who devote time, intelligence and perseverance, and who have real talent, the stage door is the Open Sesame to success. For those who regard it merely as the show window of Broadway in which to display their pictorial charms to prospective admirers, it is exactly what they believe it to be, and they never see further than Tiffany's window.

Look at the stars of today, and see where they were yesterday; humble toilers in the vineyard of endeavor. The story of each of these wonderful girls reads like a romance, and they do not hesitate to admit that their beginnings were exactly the same as those who perhaps will answer a "call" for a chorus rehearsal to-morrow.

Lenore Ulric, one of our best beloved actresses, one of the foremost stars of the present time, playing for Belasco and packing them in, getting hundreds of "fan" letters every day—and only a few short years ago a chorus girl in the La Salle Theatre in Chicago. Her rise has been phenomenal. It has

been deserved. She has taken life seriously, she has been fired by ambition, and she reached a stage in her career when her charm and talent attracted the attention of David Belasco, who has since elevated her to the highest ranks. But she is still the same Lenore Ulric that I knew when she was only a chorus girl—frank, impulsive, impetuous, charming, and sincere.

Jeanne Eagels—while I never knew her personally, her story is an open book on Broadway and reflects the greatest credit upon her as a hard working and sincere young actress. In the chorus of Richard Carle's production of "Jumping Jupiter" only a few years ago—now ranking as one of our greatest and most successful dramatic stars. How did she accomplish such a great achievement? Hard work and genius—no frivolity—no night clubs—no sensational scandals—just the case of a pretty and talented girl waiting for her opportunity, and finding it, as she did in "Outcast," and making good, only to follow it up with "Rain."

Ina Claire—not exactly in the chorus, but still famous in musical comedy as a child wonder when she was only fourteen years of age, because of her wonderful imitations. And she was in musical comedy for several years, in minor roles, until her big chance came with "The Quaker Girl." Imagine being picked for the leading role of a Broadway musical hit when only sixteen years of age; that is the story of Ina Claire, who advanced rapidly, until she became a Belasco star, then went with Charles Dillingham in "The Last of Mrs. Cheyney," and is now one of the

LENORE ULRIC

Once of the chorus, now Belasco's most famous star.

best drawing cards, from a box office standpoint, in America, because the public loves her and her work.

Elsie Janis—a child imitator of famous people. I remember meeting her first when she was seven years old and was billed as "Little Elsie." What a change now; one of the best known and most famous of theatrical stars. Musical comedy helped her along the road to fame; "The Vanderbilt Cup" gave her the first chance for stardom; and now she is an international star always sure of playing to capacity audiences.

Dorothy Dalton—when I first met her she was a show girl in the Winter Garden productions, married to Lew Cody, the comedian, the motion picture star of to-day. I think her salary was $40 a week; Lew was getting $125. They reached Los Angeles; Dorothy had a chance to go into pictures, did so, and became a big star. Lew remained, became a villain on the screen, developed a nifty mustache, and to-day is one of the highest salaried figures in the screen world. Miss Dalton found that "she travels fastest who travels alone," divorced Lew, made a tremendous hit in pictures, played "Aphrodite" for Morris Gest in New York, and then calmly annexed Arthur Hammerstein, celebrated son of a famous father and a successful producer in his own right, who declared a thousand times he would never marry again. He did; and they are both happy.

May Murray—I have already mentioned her as a chorus girl of "Kafoozelum." You know all about her and her success on the screen. But she had her first chance in the chorus.

In Ziegfeld's office at the New Amsterdam are pictures of twenty ex-Follies beauties who are now celebrated screen stars. All were once in his chorus.

Mary Hay—out of the chorus and into the cinema world. Sigrid Holmquist, from the chorus to the screen. Justine Johnston, famous chorus beauty, now celebrated screen star. Kitty Kelly, ex-chorus girl, now a near-star and headliner. Claire Luce, from the chorus of "Little Jesse James" two years ago, to premier star of the Ziegfeld Follies of to-day. Florence McFadden, Jessie Madison, Phoebe Lee, Martha Lorber, all ex-chorus girl beauties who are on the verge of stardom and will bear watching.

Peggy O'Neill, leading London actress of today, only a few years ago a chorus girl at the La Salle Theatre in Chicago. Her success abroad has been so phenomenal that she will probably never return to America.

Another illustration of how a star develops almost overnight because of her grace, her gifts and her beauty, is found in the case of Dolores Cassinelli. To-day she is known chiefly as a motion picture star who has appeared in thirty-two feature films; yet it was not so long ago that she gained her first experience as an extra girl in films, rising gradually to stardom. Nearly every theatre-goer believes she is the famous Dolores who was such a stunning figure in several productions of "The Follies," yet that Dolores was a blonde of the type that most gentlemen are supposed to prefer, whereas the real Dolores Cassinelli is of the Italian type. Despite her name

DOLORES CASSINELLI

Famous screen star, and soon to sing in Grand Opera.

Miss Cassinelli is an American girl, born in New York of Italian ancestry.

Miss Cassinelli's success and inspiration as a singer is derived chiefly from her early association with some of the world's most famous singers among them being, Enrico Caruso, Geraldine Farrar, Titta Ruffo, Giovanni Martinelli, Rosa Raisa and many other notable Italian singers and maestros. Miss Cassinelli is also an accomplished musician being able to play most of the grand opera scores right through which has helped her greatly. She has also a knowledge of languages which has helped her tremendously in her concert appearances.

All these and dozens more may be mentioned. Pick up any Sunday newspaper, turn to the amusement advertisements, and you will see many names hitherto unfamiliar. Investigate their careers and you will find that most of them, even the dramatic artists, had their first start in the chorus. It is nothing to be ashamed of; it is rather to the credit of those who have succeeded in being featured artists that once upon a time they were in the merry-merry.

The majority of chorus girls I have met are nice, quiet home girls, many of them so young that their mothers accompany them home nightly. The old idea that all chorus girls are wild and impetuous young things wooed at the stage door by "Johns," is out of date and not true. I have never seen more than a dozen men at the stage door of a big musical show, and of these, three or four were brothers or relatives. A stranger seeking to make the acquaintance of a chorus girl would probably get roughly treated by the stage hands.

Another idea is worth dispelling; chorus girls do not marry millionaires, as a rule. In my experience, I have only known one of them to marry a real wealthy man. The majority of all marriages, when a famous chorus girl does get married, suffer from the natural distortion of facts which the sensational newspapers love.

A case in point: Addie Rolfe, beautiful Follies girl, recently married a chap from Detroit, described vaguely as "a millionaire real estate dealer." He was a nice enough young chap, but merely a salaried employe hired by a real estate company.

Geneva Mitchel eloped with a Yale boy, said to be wealthy, and he turned out to be a poor relation of a rich man who was paying the boy's way through college.

Jessie Reed married an alleged Cleveland millionaire, and she said, before getting her divorce, that she had to pay all the hotel and taxi expenses during the honeymoon. And I can cite at least fifty similar cases of blasted hopes.

So much for the chorus girls, and their lives. They are lovely, charming, attractive, they have their mission in life, and they are the exquisite creatures who help make the Beauty Trust what it is. Back stage the girls are treated like ladies, in clean, comfortable dressing rooms, with elevators to carry them up and down, and if this is any digression from the proper standards of good breeding, it is due in most cases to some of the girls themselves, who may lose their tempers or who cannot boast that they were "elegant educated and swell brung up."

CHAPTER XX

The Night Clubs of Broadway

A natural outgrowth of the development of the big beauty shows of Broadway has been the so-called night clubs, where hundreds of chorus girls find employment after the usual theatre hour. These night clubs spring up like mushrooms; it is often difficult to locate the same club week after week because so many of them fail and the proprietors move on to another location. It is cheaper to move than to pay the rent; but still these clubs, in spite of many abuses, have proven wonderful aids for the many chorus girls of the Beauty Trust who may be temporarily up against it.

The night club developed rapidly after the war and with the advent of prohibition. The two were born of the same condition—a horde of rich men with plenty of money, and the lack of a place to spend it for genial entertainment. Most restaurants closed promptly at one o'clock, and none of the big establishments would take a chance selling drinks on the side. Hence the night club.

A promoter of many such clubs told me the other day:

"If I can be sure of ten good spenders a night, I can keep my place going indefinitely."

Most of the early clubs were merely holes-in-the-wall; hide-aways with a lock and a peep-hole, to which you could only be admitted with a pass-word or a card. Prohibition agents were running wild then, trying to make records and looking for graft. Conditions now have changed; if you have a big enough club with proper protection, you can run wide open, but you must be careful to put the blame on the waiter in case of trouble. On the other hand, dozens of speak-easies are in full blast without any "look-out" man on the door, and one of the biggest saloons I have ever seen runs openly with a bar, a big mirror, three bartenders in white coats, and even a free lunch counter and a wine room for the ladies within a block of the Hotel Astor.

But speaking of night clubs:

The pioneer of them all, of course, is Texas Guinan's. With the backing of a former taxi operator, Larry Fay, Miss Guinan opened the first real night club in New York. She converted an empty house in 45th street into a club where dancing was permitted, tables were built in around the walls, and a colored orchestra played. It is her boast that she never served any real liquor; nevertheless someone with influence with the waiters could always get champagne at $25 a quart or Scotch at $10 a pint. No one knows who got the money; Texas proved in court proceedings that she was only the hostess and never handled a penny, being a salaried entertainer. And what an entertainer she turned out to be.

She first gathered around her a dozen or more young chorus girls, employed in various productions,

MILDRED WAYNE

One of Broadway's Famous Beauties, now playing leading roles for Belasco.

and gave them a chance to do a "single"—which means coming out on the stage and either singing or dancing alone, something the average manager would scarcely bother with when considering his chorus girls. In this way she developed a score or more entertainers who have since become famous headliners in vaudeville or musical comedy. "Bee" Jackson, for instance, the Charleston dancer, was a Follies chorus girl, without any chance to get ahead, until Texas brought her forward and made her a headliner who was recently paid $500 a week to dance at the Embassy Club in London. "Dotty" Wilson was another chorister developed by Texas; also "Doris" Wilson, no relation; Marjorie Leet, now a celebrated dancer in "Criss-Cross"; and dozens of others.

But for Texas herself; a breezy blonde and entertaining hostess; a good fellow, with a smile and a joke for everyone and a glad handshake. She made everyone feel at home whether they had ever met her or not. But let any bad playboy from the hick towns try to get fresh with her, and she would have him thrown out on the sidewalk.

Texas used to be an actress and that is why I am including her in this story of the night life of Broadway after the Beauty Trust closes up its doors. She was born in Texas, came to New York, and went into the chorus. When I first met her she was the prima donna of a touring musical comedy in Little Rock, Arkansas. The manager of the company, the late John Slocum, told me then that some day she would be a big star on Broadway. He was right. She is; not in musical comedy but in the night clubs.

A year or so later she became a vaudeville headliner, singing rather risque songs with a husky voice, but with a personality that held you in spite of yourself. Then she went into moving pictures; she was starred for several years in a series of "westerns," being billed as "the female Bill Hart." You know the type of comedy; rough cowboy stuff, with Texas the guardian angel of the ranch and being loved by everybody. And the next thing I knew, three years ago, she walked into my office at the Globe Theatre, said she was through with pictures, had saved a small fortune, and was going to do a musical comedy production.

Then she met Fay; the El Fay Club was opened; and in a few weeks Texas had them standing in line, because she inaugurated the novel idea of the personal hostess sitting down at the table and even bringing over her little cuties to be introduced to the rich patrons of the place. But though she introduced the girls to the patrons, she had one invariable rule; the girls always had to leave her place alone, and were never allowed to go on "parties" under penalty of losing their engagements.

Texas to-day runs the Three Hundred Club; the El Fay was closed by the prohibition agents because they caught waiters selling liquor, but Texas was given a clean bill of health. To-day she is the hostess of a resort that is the first stop whenever rounders from other cities want to see the sights. She also gets the real smart Bohemian crowd, but it is the rich

Photo by White

ABBYE COLLINS

Another graduate of the chorus who rose to dramatic roles.

rounders from out of town visiting the Whizzy White Way that keep the Three Hundred Club going as the center of the gay night life of the metropolis.

Texas is a born press agent; she can invent more stories to get herself into the newspapers than any actress I have ever met. Her favorite excuse the past year or so has been Harry Thaw, the man who killed Stanford White. Thaw is there nearly every night, and until the newspapers got "wise" to her, Texas could get into the papers several times a week with some exploit involving Thaw. Once she said he was engaged to one of her dancers; that proved a boomerang because he denied it; then she had Thaw reconciled with Evelyn Nesbitt and claimed she was about to give a big supper party to celebrate the reconciliation, but Thaw balked at that. Lately she has been getting columns and columns about a horseman named "Charlie" Frey, who seems to love publicity just as much as Texas does. One night she had him put out of the Three Hundred Club; the next night she forgave him and permitted him to enter, but barred Wilda Bennett, the girl who was mentioned as the next Mrs. Frey. And so it goes—night after night there is always a good newspaper story from Texas.

All the celebrities in Bohemia gather to see Texas; Peggy Hopkins Joyce may be there with an Austrian count or a prospective husband or one of her devoted admirers, or even an ex-husband; all is grist that comes to the mill of Texas. She works the telephone overtime calling up the newspapers. In the past year or so, she has handed out much free

publicity for her club. No matter who comes, she manages to get headlines. And in this respect, she receives aid from the reporters of the gay life of Broadway, such writers as Mark Hellinger of the *News,* and Walter Winchell of the *Graphic,* who literally "eat up" any sensational story she can hand them. One must admit, most of her stories have some foundation in fact, and the parties concerned, especially Harry Thaw, are tickled to death to get publicity for themselves. Thaw is the greatest publicity hound in New York to-day—next to Texas.

There are dozens of other night clubs, patterned on the same plan; the Silver Slipper Club, where Beryl Halley, formerly one of our most beautiful Follies girls, appears nightly as Eve wearing a blonde wig and several pieces of court plaster; there are also several "class" clubs, such as Roger Wolf Kahn's club (conducted by the son of Otto Kahn) and the Mirador, absolutely the last word in social distinction, conducted by Ray Goetz, and with Maurice and Eleanor Ambrose as the featured dancers.

But perhaps the best description of the real night clubs, and the authentic guide for the stranger is found in the following reprint from the columns of *Variety,* the interesting weekly conducted by Sime Silverman. Here is his report, couched in the inimitable and original vernacular which only this weekly possesses:

"VARIETY'S" BROADWAY GUIDE

For show people as well as laymen, this Guide to general amusements in New York will be published weekly in response to repeated requests.

Variety lends the judgment of its expert guidance in the various entertainment denoted.

No slight or blight is intended for those unmentioned. The lists are of *Variety's* compilation only and as a handy reference.

It may serve the out-of-towner as a time saver in selection.

Night Clubs

(Hotsy-Totsy or "Sawdust" Cabarets)

Avalon Club, $2 and $3 couvert, the latter on week-ends. Liveliest around 3 a. m. and thereafter. Good floor show. Cozy and intimate.

The Black Bottom Club is an education. Hot! And how! Harlem transplanted to Broadway. Must be known to get in. No couvert; everything reasonable.

Dover Club, "Those three boys," Jimmie Durante, Eddie Jackson and Lou Clayton. Enough for the "wise" mob. Couvert $2. Always lively.

Texas Guinan's 300 Club, $3 couvert. Rates as "human museum." Celebs rub shoulders with everybody.

Small's Paradise, Harlem "black and tan." The showplace of Harlem's mixed cafes. Quite the thing with the dress crowd for wind-up spot and thrill. Whites and blacks rub shoulders and celestials dance with either race. Very hotsy-totsy and reasonable. Lots of atmosphere. May encounter your colored maid, porter or chauffeur at the next table, but race, color or previous condition of servitude doesn't count. Don't miss the Monday morning breakfast dances.

The Nest, Hoofer's Club and Club Bamville, all Harlem "black and tans," also with atmosphere and novelty, unlike the regulation colored spots in Harlem for strictly white trade. The Nest's Friday a. m. dance marathons are also worth while.

"Popular" Type Cafes

Substantial type of night club, giving customers a good floor show for $2 or $3 couvert, the latter for Saturday nights, and a reasonable menu scale.

Vincent Lopez, at Casa Lopez.

Anatole Friedland, songwriter-master of ceremonies heads at Club Anatole. Scale $3 and $4, attempting to be somewhat "classy," but actually drawing "popular" type patronage.

The Parody Club is inclined to be hotsy-totsy, depending on evening and attendance. That condition goes similarly for the Parody Club, Everglades and Tommy Guinan's Playground. All standards among night life places.

Club Barney, on West 3d Street, is Broadway brought to Greenwich Village. Nothing particularly Bohemian but alleged atmosphere of the locale. Connie's Inn and the Cotton Club are Harlem institutions unlike the genuineness of Small's, also a transplanted Broadway further uptown.

"Class" Night Clubs

Roger Wolfe Kahn's Le Perroquet de Paris is the last gasp in smart night clubs. Ultra artistic and ultra in following. The millionaire maestro's own crack dance band. Be sure to make it. $5 couvert.

For the dress-ups. Not that dinner jacket is open sesame. If they need you badly enough, you can come in overalls, providing you look like a b. r. But with the winter season, the Lido, Montmartre, Mirador, Club Richman and Rendezvous more or less high-hat spots. Not so much the last two but the climbers and the actuals play the Lido, Montmartre and Mirador.

Chez Fysher (former Plantation) has A. Nilson Fysher and Guilli-Guilli, fakir, who sits at tables. $3 and $4.

"Kill Time" Spots

Recommended for those with several or many minutes hanging heavy in between dates, are Hubert's Museum on West 42d Street.

Two distinctive public ballrooms are the Arcadia and Roseland, on Broadway at 53d and 51st Street, respectively, where refined general demeanor distinguishes these from others.

For a slant at hotsy-totsy stepping by the adolescents are the Trianon, Orpheum and Paradise, situated at 46th to 48th Streets, on Broadway.

After reading the above, it's your own fault if you don't have a good time from midnight until 7 a. m. on Broadway. Of course there is a 3 a. m. curfew law in pass—but it will probably be enforced about as much as prohibition.

CHAPTER XXI

The Theatre as a Real-Estate Investment

Would you like to have your name in electric lights in front of a theatre named after you? You can do this if you have the modest sum of approximately $120,000. With that sum any one of a dozen real estate investors will build a theatre on one of the side streets near Broadway and lease it to you for twenty years. You can have the privilege of naming the theatre after yourself.

Theatres are going up so rapidly in New York that a great many people think the real estate end of the game is being overdone. There are now approximately sixty first class theatres producing high-class dramatic and musical attractions in the theatrical district of New York, or else being leased for motion pictures. At the time this chapter is being written, November, 1926, ten more theatres are in process of construction and at least a dozen more will be built in the next three or four years.

Why are so many theatres being erected? Certainly not because there is any great demand for them on the part of playwrights or managers. There is no overproduction of brains to provide plays for all these theatres. Over 260 plays were produced last year and 183 of them failed. More than half the theatres in New York to-day are housing failures

and playing to deplorable receipts. Yet as fast as one play fails and receives the curse of Cain's Storehouse, more plays, mostly poor productions and badly written, come rushing in to occupy one of the new theatres. Back of each show of course, is an "angel" and that is the reason why so many theatres are being erected.

Each theatre can tell a story of some enterprising real estate promoter who has had sense enough and genius enough to develop a plan whereby he can become rich at the expense of the army of "angels" constantly storming Broadway. In the case of a play that is produced on Broadway, anywhere from $30,000 to $75,000 may be lost and nothing remains from the wreck except second-hand scenery which can be sold for a few hundred dollars. But if the "angel" chooses to invest his money in a theatre or in acquiring the lease of a theatre, then at least he has something tangible on his hands. For this reason a great many real estate promoters have interested "angels" with money in the business of building a theatre. This has nothing whatever to do with the actual production of plays, but is responsible for a deplorable condition which creates a tremendous supply of theatres which, however, can be rented at outrageous prices to the "angels" who back shows, as they seem to rush in by the thousands.

Here is the process of building a theatre: A real estate promoter has an option on several lots on a side street not far from Broadway. He may own the land outright, or more likely he has only an equity in the property with a heavy mortgage. The build-

ings on the ground are usually second or third class tenement houses of the kind that were considered very fine thirty years ago. Their rental value to-day is practically enough only to pay the taxes on the property and the interest on the mortgage.

The real estate operator therefore decides it will be more profitable for him to build a theatre. The theatre is always rented before it is built. He will approach someone with a little money who is interested in theatricals and explain the enormous profits to be made in the ownership of a theatre. The real estate man will build a theatre costing approximately $300,000 on his own land (which is already mortgaged up to the hilt) and he will lease the theatre to the angel for twenty years at approximately $60,000 a year, provided the angel pays in advance the rent for the first year and for the last year.

This amount, $120,000 in cash, is handed over to the real estate operator and with this money in the bank, he can begin the erection of the theatre. He also easily raises the balance necessary on a second mortgage covering several years.

The new lessee then sublets the theatre on short-term contracts for approximately $4,500 per week. This exorbitant rental, out of all proportion to the original rental, is gladly paid for short-terms of three or four weeks by other "angels" who back a show and insist upon a New York opening.

Just as long as the supply of "angels" lasts, just so long will new theatres be built. Just as long as they can be sublet at $4,500 per week to the "come-ons," just so long will the theatre continue to be

operated as a private real estate proposition in which no one can lose except the "angel" who produces the show.

George W. Lederer, who was one of our big producing managers twenty-five years ago, is now working for someone else. He made millions of dollars for his backers and lost it again through the production of plays which turned out to be failures. I asked him one day last Summer why he had ceased to produce shows.

"I ran through the entire list of 'angels' on Broadway in my time," said Mr. Lederer with a smile. "After a dozen years or more there was not a Wall Street broker left who had failed to invest in one of my productions. Now there is a new generation of 'angels' in the field, and I suppose they are being grabbed off rapidly by the younger producers.

"The tremendous prosperity of this country at the present time explains why we have so many new 'angels' who are invading Broadway. They know nothing of the theatrical business and that is why as a rule they lose. The wise 'angels' are the ones who invest their money building theatres but even they are really making a bad investment because while their profits appear to be big at first, they do not look into the future.

"The man leasing a band-box theatre on a side street for $65,000 a year, gets the income as long as he is able to sublet it. But at the end of the twenty years if he lives that long, he will have paid to the real estate operator $1,260,000. From this money

the real estate operator pays off all the mortgages, puts at least $800,000 in the bank to his own credit and he still owns the theatre. I do not believe the business of building theatres for real estate speculation will cease until we have at least One Hundred theatres in the Times Square district. Then the balloon will burst and a great many theatres will be turned into garages."

Never associate the reputable and responsible theatrical managers who have put the business on a firm foundation in the last generation, with the new element of real estate speculation that thinks not of the drama or the play, but only of the rents. A. L. Erlanger for instance, built the magnificent New Amsterdam Theatre as a home for his own production; Charles Frohman erected the Empire Theatre as a producing center of high-class plays, a policy which his successor, Gilbert Miller has consistently and admirably preserved; Charles Dillingham built the Globe Theatre as a home for his own musical productions; the Shuberts erected the Shubert Theatre as a monument to their brother's memory and as the principal link in the chain of theatres which they have since developed; Al Woods built the Eltinge Theatre because he wanted a home for his own attractions and Sam Harris (in association with George M. Cohan) built the Harris Theatre on 42d Street as the permanent home of the Cohan and Harris productions.

These theatres, erected to advance the interests of dramatic art, were all financed by men familiar with

the theatrical business and who intended them to be used as theatres, not as real estate investments.

The majority of the other theatres which have been erected in New York in the past eight years were financed almost entirely by men who had not the slightest idea how to produce a play. One theatre was even built without any dressing rooms because the owners did not realize that actors changed their costumes once in a while. In this case they were compelled to buy a piece of property adjoining the theatre so that they could provide the necessary dressing rooms.

There is another angle to the mushroom growth of theatres in New York that is little understood even by those right in the business. This is a tendency on the part of the big motion picture companies to lease theatres outright for the Broadway exploitation of some feature picture. I have known personally of cases where several of our biggest companies paid $5,000 a week rental for the bare four walls of a theatre and assumed operating expenses and advertising bills amounting to $10,000 per week.

In the case of these small theatres, even if every ticket is sold at every performance, the picture lessees could not take in enough money to pay expenses. But the big companies can afford to rent theatres at almost prohibitive rates merely because of the so-called advertising and sales value of a picture which has enjoyed a Broadway run. Even though a feature picture may lose $75,000 or $100,000 in promoting a Broadway publicity campaign and a Broadway showing, this sum will be charged off by the motion

picture company as part of the cost of production, and ultimately is paid by the 17,000 exhibitors all over the country, who have to pay a trifle more rental for the film when it is produced in the smaller cities, because it is advertised as a feature with "A Year's Run on Broadway."

This situation encourages tremendously the building of new theatres which are not needed for the drama, which are not really motion picture houses, but which afford the lessees an opportunity to pay the rental and make a profit by subletting. No one can blame a speculator for erecting a theatre since he knows that he can almost always fall back upon the motion picture producers for high rentals for short periods of time; and if not pictures, some "angel" with a play featuring a pretty girl.

This invasion of Broadway by the motion picture interests has already deprived nearly a dozen legitimate theatres of the opportunity to present real plays and dramas. Such dramatic productions are forced off Broadway into the side streets because the rental is cheaper. At the present writing I can mention ten leading Broadway theatres that have been leased by motion picture interests, not to make money (because they are too small to take in sufficient receipts) but merely as exhibition windows for the exploitation of motion pictures. The big motion picture theatres which can seat three or four thousand people at one performance are operated for money and turn in tremendous profits; but the smaller theatres which were originally built for dramatic productions are leased solely for advertising purposes.

Their use in this connection merely means that every few minutes you may hear an explosion somewhere near 8th Avenue together with the pounding of the riveters as they put in place the steel beams of another structure.

Whenever such an explosion is heard, blasting of rock for a foundation, the wise cracker of Broadway will say:

"Ah, another theatre going up."

CHAPTER XXII

A Little Bit of Fluff

The winds of Fate play funny tricks, they catch a speck of dust and throw it into the eyes of rich and poor alike; they grasp a scrap of paper and toss it into a whirlwind as ruthlessly as a cyclone or a tornado sweeps everything before it; and so it is not strange that they seized upon a little puff ball from the corn fields of Kentucky and wafted it four thousand miles to the edge of the lagoon under the trees of Armenonville, the garden restaurant of Paris.

That is where I found her a few weeks ago, at a table on the edge of the lagoon, gazing out over the water—a pretty bit of fluff, a delicate wisp of a puffball. Only a year or so ago the winds of Fate blew this dainty doll up and down Broadway, coldly, cruelly, unkindly. She left a memorable trail of eiderdown behind her; some few wisps of fluffy nothingness drifted aimlessly in her wake and then subsided into space; but while she was the plaything of Broadway, men raved about her loveliness and women frowned in disapproval.

A pretty bit of fluff—and now, after a year, I found her again in Paris. On the edge of the lagoon at Armenonville, still dreamily beautiful; alone, waiting for me; just as she had waited languidly so many

IMOGENE WILSON

Most beautiful show girl on Broadway in this generation.

times before in the Hermitage during the luncheon hour when she was excused from rehearsals, and Flo and Gene sat at nearby tables discussing new features for the "Follies."

And now as the waiter skillfully serves a bottle of Pommery and the large blue eyes smile a welcome and the soft summer breezes make her golden tresses tremble slightly, let me turn back the scrapbook of time a few pages—while she ponders.

She came to us from the land of fair women and brave men; from a State hallowed with the chivalry of two hundred years. Blown upon the winds of Fate she came, an orphan raised in a convent, knowing little of life except that all men told her she was beautiful.

Of course she came to the "Follies"; the most widely-advertised beauty market of the world, for here alone could she get full market value for her marvelous form and features. Henry Clive saw her first, as an artist's model. He brought her to Ziegfeld; and overnight she blossomed forth as the fairest of all flowers in that wonderful garden of girls. I saw her first at a rehearsal; a slim young creature in practice clothes, the scantiness of her attire accentuating the perfect lines of her body. Her face seemed to have the sort of halo that artists fancy they see in their dreams. Her exquisite features lighted up with a smile at every word; she seemed the embodiment of all that was pure and good and lovely in glorified gorgeous youth.

Artists went mad about her; magazine editors begged for her photographs; costumers and modistes

flooded the country with her pictures, displaying their wares; dramatic editors who loved to print beautiful pictures, used up more than three hundred photographs of her in less than six months; Cheney Johnston had to put on a night shift of men in his studio to turn out enough photos of this wonderful girl; and "Ziggie" declared her the most beautiful girl he had ever glorified.

As press representative of the "Follies," at that time, it became my duty to act as her official chaperone at stated intervals. I guided the newspaper boys into her stately presence when they wished for interviews; I consulted with her on various plans of publicity that would make her famous and a great star. She loved publicity; adored it; was never fed up with too much free space in the papers. Her scrapbook, kept by my office boy, soon ran into a second volume. Cranks began to besiege her; strange men waited at the stage door; flowers and presents from admirers came like a deluge; the stage door man at the "Follies" became rich in a few weeks from tips for delivering mash notes; in other words, she was distinctly IT: she was the talk of the town, the toast of a dozen admirers, the world of cavaliers at her feet.

Then came the crash; beaten up by an actor. A famous comedian, jealous of the attentions of other men, smashed her one on the nose and a couple of more on the side of the head for good measure.

Let no one ever tell you this was a press agent story; I know, because in my official capacity I was sent to visit her the next day, and found her with

two nurses, a badly bruised, hysterical, pitiful young woman. The colored maid was still cowering upon a couch in the corner, wailing and crying because she too had been beaten. A sympathetic doctor had given the show girl first aid; her head was swathed with bandages, and one of the nurses told me there was a gash an inch long in her scalp. The whole affair is over now; it was tried in the courts and the comedian was given a Scotch verdict of "not proven." WHY? Because when the grand jury heard the fair young damsel's story, she had relented; he was HER MAN; he had a right to beat her, and it was nobody's business if he did.

And so the winds of Fate blew the little bit of fluff from Broadway and across the seas. But not until the affair had ruined the comedian's drawing power for theatregoers; not until the puff-ball herself had come in for some unpleasant notoriety and had been fired from the "Follies" for being "too notorious"—rather a doubtful compliment, if you analyze it carefully.

And the comedian and the "Bit of Fluff" faced a life together across the seas, and the comedian's wife got a divorce—and the London audiences found him not so funny after all with his sparring partner ever at his side; and so we draw the curtain for a year.

"I don't fancy I shall ever return to "America," said the "Puff Ball" softly, as she sipped the champagne. "You were one of the only friends who really stuck to me after the blow-off, so I may speak freely

to you. If I ever do return to New York, they will have to spread a red carpet for me in Times Square.

"I have learned many serious lessons since those days when I was a mere foolish girl. I fancied that because I had won fame and publicity, it would bring me a fortune at once. I had a marvelous motion-picture contract with Douglas Fairbanks to act as his leading woman, at six hundred dolars a week, if only the comedian had never staged that battle. Mary Pickford herself selected me after they had taken test of hundreds of girls.

"If I had never met the comedian, if I had never become infatuated with him, my career would have been vastly different. He has ruined himself professionally—and he has ruined my career temporarily also. I have come, however, to the crossroads and I know that from now on I must make my own way in life and begin all over again.

"I am happy to say that I have been working in pictures in Berlin; that I have completely and positively broken with the comedian, and have not seen him for months; and that I have a very nice proposition to act in a picture in Italy. It costs little to live over here in Europe and I can make enough in one picture to last me for several months. Don't believe all the horrid things some people still say of me—that I have been having a gay time on Letellier's yacht in the Mediterranean; that I have been in Madrid to dance before the King of Spain; or that I am about to marry a rich Argentinian; that is all, if I may use the vernacular of the 'Follies' dressing rooms, apple sauce and poppycock.

"I have a few friends, naturally; I enjoy going to the races in my spare time; I am living in a modest little apartment with a jewel of a French maid; and so long as I have my health—and I hope a few of my looks left—I think I can continue to support myself in the movies."

Darkness came; the lights of the Bois flickered through the trees. The Puff Ball shivered slightly. I paid the check—think of it, champagne at $3.00 per—and we sped back to town in a taxi.

Around the Arch de Triomphe, down the beautiful and brilliantly-lighted Avenue de Champs Elysee, and then into a side avenue not far from the Etoile district. It was nine o'clock; I left the Puff Ball at the door of her apartment house. "I always retire early! I never go out late on parties; I have been in Paris for three months and I have never seen Montmartre; I am working hard studying French, also Italian, and I have my lessons early to-morrow. And so—good night."

A pretty bit of Fluff; I feel sure that some day winds of Fate will blow the Puff Ball back across the seas. Knowing her as I do, I have found by experience that one should always "copper the bet," on whatever she says. But, here's good luck to you, Puff Ball, which ever way the winds may blow you henceforth.

* * * *

And so we draw the curtain on the Beauty Trust of Broadway. Naturally one can get only a few glimpses behind the scenes when the curtains are opened or closed. The subject is of course too colossal

to be comprehended within the limits of an ordinary book. Millions of words could be written of the heart-breaks of Broadway, the eternal battle for the limelight, the struggles of ponies, show girls, stars, producers, butterflies, angels, rich rounders and other hangers-on of the Whizzy White Way; but in these few reminiscences of one who has known whereof he speaks, perhaps there may be retained in permanent form some of those characteristic features which have made Broadway the most interesting and the most fascinating street in the entire world, this year of 1926.

ADDENDA

"TEACHING A GRANDMOTHER TO MILK DUCKS"

Being Several Hitherto Unpublished Letters

by

BERNARD SHAW

Edited, with Notes, by

WILL A. PAGE

In reading this article I deleted the quite obviously improper-for-publication passages; but on finishing it I find that it is impossible for me to license the publication in such a context of any of the letters of which I own the copyright, or any part of them. The letters must therefore be omitted.

G. Bernard Shaw 12/7/20.

"Teaching a Grandmother to Milk Ducks"

Herewith are given to the reading world for the first time, four letters written by Bernard Shaw some twenty odd years ago before the celebrated author had become famous as a dramatist. The publication in this volume seems appropriate to me for two reasons; first, because Mr. Shaw has now become an international character in the theatrical world and anything he writes should be preserved for posterity; and second, because they reveal this eccentric genius from an entirely new angle.

Of course Mr. Shaw takes exquisite pleasure in doing the unexpected, and I am doing the same in publishing his letters. It is a certainty that when he wrote these letters, he was comparatively unknown except to the reading world. He was also ready to dispose of his plays for almost nothing, merely for the sake of having them acted and with a possible chance of future revenue. I have been tempted many times to publish these letters before this, but circumstances intervened together with personal protests from Mr. Shaw against their publication.

Henry L. Menken, the famous iconoclast who is now the editor of *The American Mercury,* was dramatic critic of *The Baltimore Herald* at the time this controversy with Mr. Shaw took place, and it was partially due to Mr. Menken's suggestion that I began the negotiations with Mr. Shaw which resulted

in the following correspondence. Mr. Menken recently wished to reprint these letters in *The American Mercury,* and being the favored Shaw biographer for America, requested the Sage of Adelphi Terrace to acquiese in their publication. Mr. Shaw indignantly refused on the ground that the conditions which prevailed when the letters were written do not prevail now, but I believe he was secretly afraid they showed him in rather a humorous light. Later on Mr. Morgan Shuster, President of the Century Company, desired to print the letters in *The Century Magazine* and submitted them with an article by me to Mr. Shaw, the understanding with Mr. Shuster being that any price paid for them should go to the Actors' Fund, although no sum was ever mentioned by Mr. Shuster or by me. At first Mr. Shaw agreed, provided he could have the privilege of editing the letters and eliminating certain matter, but after he had made the deletions he thought necessary, he changed his mind again and cabled Mr. Shuster not to print the letters.

In giving these letters to the public now, I feel that I am quite within my rights because of the well known fact of American law that a letter belongs not to the person who wrote it, but to the person who receives it. In England, so I am informed, the law is just the reverse. However, even though Mr. Shaw has quite a lot of fun ridiculing me in these letters the fact remains that they also show him possessing a vein of curious humor of which he is quite unconscious. Furthermore, the lapse of years has probably added to the value of the letters. And since only the

other day new fragmentary writings of Napoleon were discovered and printed, it does not seem fair that a palpitating world should wait another century before perusing these literary gems from the pen of the illustrious Bernard Shaw.

The letters from Mr. Shaw in the following article are printed verbatim just as they were received by me. Copies of the letters with this article were sent to Mr. Shaw by Mr. Shuster and he deleted certain lines and made certain changes in his own handwriting, which are herewith printed in *Italics*. It is worth noticing that much of the matter which he deleted relate to the financial arangements, and that he originated at least one phrase which to me was entirely original—"To teach your grandmother to milk ducks." Another phrase which he desired to eliminate was the line which he added to his gentle reproof for my audacity, "You may prove useful later on."

But first a prelude. Turn back the pages of time to Spring, 1902. The place, Baltimore, Md. A cozy little theatre wherein appeared a stock company owned and operated by the eminent George Fawcett, able character actor and scholar. I, a partner, in his enterprise and his manager. A worthy company included many players who have seen become famous. Mary Shaw, Percy Haswell, Frank Gillmore, Frederick Lewis, Frank Craven, Laura McGillivray, Regan Hughston—mere names then, now celebrities. Mr. Fawcett himself was famous both here and aboard, but he had elected to act for a season or two in Baltimore. A close friendship formed with me while I was dramatic critic of the Washington Post,

had led him to ask me to join him in the enterprise. I was young, ambitious, keenly interested in the theatre, and fired with an energy to do my little best to help elevate the stage and establish new standards.

The Independent Theatre movement of London, founded by J. T. Grein and fostered by Shaw, had aroused my interest. I conceived the project of duplicating to a certain extent the same scheme in Baltimore, giving a Shaw play each week. I also planned to include Washington and New York in the general uplift. I therefore approached Fawcett and outlined my prospectus, Mr. Fawcett was then, and still is, one of America's greatest actors, and I hold it not to his discredit that he lifted his hands in holy horror, when I explained that I wanted to announce ten of Bernard Shaw's plays, one a week, giving special matinees in Washington, and morning performances in New York.

"The man's clever," admitted Fawcett, "But if these Shaw plays were any good, the big managers would have grabbed them long ago. I can't afford to take chances with such freak writers as Shaw."

Consider the situation in the year 1902: the Shaw plays had been published in a limited edition by Herbert Stone in Chicago. Only two Shaw plays had ever been acted in America, "Arms and the Man" and "The Devil's Disciple" both by Mansfield. There were a dozen Shaw plays available, yet no commercial manager would touch them, either in London or New York. Arnold Daly, who acted "Candida" two years later, was then a minor actor in a Frohman company. Winchell Smith, afterward's Daly's partner, was act-

ing the eccentric role of a hotel porter in "The Girl from Kay's," a musical comedy. George Tyler had not even dreamed of doing "Mrs. Warren's Profession." There was no such thing as a Theatre Guild. Chrystal Herne was unknown, Mary Shaw was playing in our stock company, Forbes Robertson had never dreamed of acting Caesar, and the Shaw plays were in general acting disrepute because of the widespread fact that Mansfield had turned down "Caesar," and Ada Rehan had rejected "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." Under these adverse conditions I pleaded with Fawcett to announce a ten week's season of Shaw, calling it a "Shaw Festival." Of course I pleaded in vain.

Finally, however, I encountered Fawcett in a genial mood one day, and from his remarks concluded that he had reconsidered. At once I wrote a letter to Shaw, outlining the proposition. I wrote with the enthusiasm of youth, and because neither Fawcett nor I had extensive backing, I suggested that Shaw permit me to announce the plays, paying a straight ten percent royalty, without any advance payments whatever. The splendid audacity of such a proposition, if made today, may be imagined. The absolute disregard in which the Shaw plays were then held by managers, is proven by the amazing fact that Shaw accepted my proposition. By return mail came the following letter, which reached me during the summer of 1902, and which I quote verbatim.

Letter No. 1

10 Adelphi Terrace, London, W. C.
July 7, 1902.

Mr. William A. Page:
Dear Sir:

Your letter of June 17th has just reached me. I confess I wish you had enclosed a certificate of your sanity; but I will give you the benefit of the doubt whether your head is longer or shorter than the others. All my plays, including "Arms and the Man" and "The Devil's Disciple," are at my disposal, and I am prepared to deal with you on a royalty basis of 10% without any advance. But before I commit myself to this or any other arrangement, I want to know definitely what you mean by giving you "any commercial preference you (1) can, in case any of these plays should prove so successful that they should be in demand from other managers." Suppose you produce "Caesar and Cleopatra," and that your performance, though not a financial success for you, or an artistic success such as could be achieved by a star actor of the first magnitude, yet got talked of sufficiently to convince Mansfield that he was wrong in refusing to play it! The same thing might happen with Miss Rehan and "Captain Brassbound's Conversion;" but Miss Rehan might play under your management, if you secured a theatre in New York for the occasion, whereas Mansfield would only produce in his own theatre under his own management, leaving you out in the cold. What would you expect me to do under these circumstances? All that I should be prepared to do would be to refuse to give Mansfield an exclusive license as against you; but you would have no chance of playing it against him in the towns he visits; and I doubt whether he would pay you much or anything to buy you off playing. It seems to me that in the case of those plays which would, if their value was once proved, tempt stars to take them up as repertory plays, you would be at a great disadvantage. Your expenditure and initiative

would benefit me and the star without benefiting yourself. Have you considered this?

I would certainly not begin with "Mrs. Warren's Profession." It would stamp the whole enterprise as unsuitable for family patronage. You should make yourself safe with "Caesar," "You Never Can Tell," "Captain Brassbound" and "Candida," before touching the "unpleasant" plays; and then you should make it perfectly clear to the public that they had better see "Mrs. Warren" for themselves before they bring their boys and girls to it. "Widower's Houses" is a good acting play—better than it looks—but the people in it are very English and very un-American. "The Philanderer" *is a nasty play.* It has never been acted at all except at the usual copyrighting farce; and unless you can get it handled by a very clever comedian and a woman who can make a sensation as Julia, it might be as well to let it alone. "The Devil's Disciple" has been squeezed to the last drop by Mansfield: it was a heavy financial success and he made the most of it. I doubt if there is a dollar left in it for the present, as far as New York, Baltimore and Washington is concerned. It is certainly exhausted in New York. Arms and the Man has had eight years to refresh it; so that it might be worth a little; but it is not a novelty. As to "The Admirable Bashville," it is a mere *jeu d' esprit* for literary people; it never occurred to me that anyone would dream of playing it. At all events it will be as well to make it clear that it is as much a joke as Bombastes Furioso or Chrononhotonthologos.

As to calling the thing a Festival, the only objection to that is that it is nonsense, and will be interpreted by the public as a promise of exceptionally resplendent mounting and an imposing list of stars. Can you live up to it? If not, would it not be wiser to call it a "cycle," which is more compatible with plain living and high thinking? A "festival" production of "Caesar" ought to cost $30,000; a Bernard Shaw cycle could go at a little less. Anyhow, drop the George: two names are enough for one line of a playbill

and nobody ever calls me anything longer than Bernard Shaw.

Your plan of combining Washington and New York with Baltimore seems likely to kill your company; but if they don't object, I don't.

My agent in America is Miss Elizabeth Marbury, of the Empire Theatre building, 40th Street and Broadway, New York. I am sending her a copy of your letter with a draft agreement and instructions to arrange the matter with you.

I fully expect that when it comes to the point you will find that an eleven o'clock performance in New York is not practicable. However I am not the man to bar an experiment, though unless you try it on Sunday you will not have many men in the house.

I have just (since writing the above) heard that Miss Marbury is in Paris. If I send the draft agreement through her, she will lose the next mail to America; so I send you a copy of the draft herewith, sending a duplicate to Miss Marbury, and retaining a copy for myself. I may say that Miss Marbury and Mr. Brander Matthews, with whom I have been in communication through Mr. William Archer, speak of your enterprise in terms which leave me no hesitation in leaving myself largely in your hands. If you want anything else put in the agreement, or any modifications made, there is plenty of time to settle it before the winter season.

I may mention, as to "The Devil's Disciple," that though Mr. Mansfield had powers under our expired agreement to exploit it outside his own circuit, he never did so. Consequently it is still a new play so far as the minor towns are concerned.

In case you should think later on of sending out a travelling company in such regions, I may say that I do not expect 10% on the gross except when the receipts exceed Pounds 500. When they exceed Pounds 250 but do not exceed Pounds 500 I ask 7 1-2% on the gross. When they do not exceed Pounds 250 5% is enough. When I apply this scale to first class business I ask 12 1-2% on the gross when the

receipts exceed Pounds 750; but I prefer a simple 10% all through when my plays are played in repertory and not run clean out. This scale, you will observe, differs from the usual American Sliding scale, (which is not a sliding scale at all but a graduated one); but it is simpler and not practically different, as when an English author considers an American proposal he generally tests it by the sliding scale he is used to, and bargains for the same result, whichever method of arriving at it be adopted. However, this is beside the present question; I mention it only in case you should find my plays likely to prove worth a more extended exploitation.

I am afraid you will find "Caesar" difficult to cast. The part of Caesar himself requires a *great* actor. I am not quite sure that there is time to get through the whole play without great skill and smartness; but the only possible cut is to cut the third act clean out and say so flatly on the program. "The Man of Destiny" is very bothersome in point of length, as it is too long for a curtain raiser and not long enough for a whole evening. Your proposal to play "The Admirable Bashville" with it is not a bad one, if you could depend on your audience to stand such nonsense; but an alternative would be to play the first act of "Julius Caesar," which is complete in itself, instead. Yours faithfully,

G. Bernard Shaw.

To say that I was amazed when I received this communication of nearly 2,000 words, is to put the case mildly. I had shot at random at a star; my arrow had indeed plucked a fine bird of Paradise. And then what eagerness to close the contract—a contract which gave him not one penny of cash in advance. The anxiety about catching the next mail; the fine detail about royalties on touring companies and special performances; the sliding scale and the graduated scale. Here indeed was a fine mess of porridge from a

great literary light whose works had been so sadly neglected that he had plunged overseas to grab and swallow whole the bait which seemed so tempting. Yet one thing puzzled me. The letter, addressed to me in person, spoke of the high praise bestowed upon my enterprise by the eminent Brander Matthews, whom I had never met. Mr. Fawcett however soon set me right when I rushed to him with my precious letter.

"Brander Matthews spends his summers down at 'Sconsett where I have a cottage," explained Fawcett, "But what sort of a mess are you getting me in, making a fool proposition like that to Shaw? I tell you, the man's a crank. His plays are only for literary people, to be read, not acted. I'm not going to run into bankruptcy as a result of your crazy notion. Write and tell him I said so."

Crushed and crestfallen, I retired from his august presence. *I hadn't the heart to break the sad news to Shaw. That faithful and trusting genius, awaiting abroad the signed contract (draft of which he enclosed to me), looking forward in vain to those graduated—or was it sliding?—royalties which now could never be, was a vision I could not face with equanimity.* I read the contract carefully. It was in Fawcett's name as the responsible manager, and mine only as his agent. True, I had expected and believed Fawcett would cooperate with me in carrying out the contract, yet now when he deliberately withdrew from the enterprise, was I to let Shaw suffer the pangs of disappointment? No.

I spent $7.25 sending Shaw a cable that he had misunderstood; that my proposition involved the

appearance of Fawcett as an actor and not necessarily as a manager; and to change the contracts to my name. Then I bought a ticket to New York to close the matter with Miss Marbury's office, and to interest someone else in the scheme. I went direct to Harrison Grey Fiske, who cordially approved of what I had done, offered to share the enterprise with me, and to arrange to present the plays in the Manhattan Theatre, then under his management. Then in reply to my cable came—

LETTER No. 2

Victoria Arms, Holkham, Norfolk,
25th July, 1902.

William A. Page, Esq.

Dear Sir:

Your cable has followed me to the seaside, where I shall be for the next six weeks or so. The contracts are only in draft; so we can arrange for any verbal alterations. I was under the impression that you were acting in behalf of the George Fawcett company.

I very stupidly forgot to let you know my registered telegraphic address, which is "Socialist, London." I have a copy of Lowe's cable code in case you have occasion to use it. But you will probably have settled the affair with Miss Marbury's people by the time you get this.

Yours faithfully,

G. BERNARD SHAW.

P. S.—I have no letters or documents down here, so must make a guess at your address.

Between the 25th of July when this letter was written, and the 13th of August, the Greatest Genius of Them All was still summering in Norfolk; but evi-

dently some other proposition for his plays reached him, as he admits in his next letter. Also he had possibly imagined that the bait which at first seemed so attractive, was nothing but sea-weed after all. Meanwhile my letter, written in all sincerity to him in returning the contracts and voicing my youthful enthusiasm over his plays, did not seem quite so substantial as a contract signed by a property-owning star actor with an earning capacity of $25,000 a year. Mr. Fawcett's complete disavowal of the scheme was now apparent to the Quintessence of Ibsenism, for next came—

LETTER No. 3

10 Adelphi Terrace, London, W. C.
13th August, 1902.

Mr. William A. Page,
Washington, D. C., U. S. A.

Dear Sir:

I have left your letter unanswered for some days, as I had to make fresh inquiries. *No result has come of them, and you must now fight the matter out with Miss Marbury, or with her chief of staff in New York, Miss Geary.*

I confess I am beginning to revert to my original suspicions of your sanity. Surely you do not expect me to make a contract with you without giving me one single reference as to your standing and financial capacity. You wrote to me on the paper of the George Fawcett company, with your name printed as business manager. I made inquiries as to the position of Mr. George Fawcett and his company. The replies were satisfactory, and I drafted a contract accordingly. Now you tell me that Mr. George Fawcett has nothing to do with it—that you wrote me on your own account. This alters the whole case. If the acting manager of the Lyceum, St. James's and His Majesty's theatres were to

write to me on official paper to secure rights in my plays, and, when the contracts were ready, were to inform me that they were not acting for Sir Henry Irving, Mr. Alexander or Mr. Beerbohm Tree, I should express myself in the most intemperate manner. You strike me dumb by thanking me for my unwarranted confidence in you. Now I protest I haven't any confidence in you. I am as open to conviction about you as I was in the case of Fawcett; but the assurances I received as to his standing and competence did not apply to you; and your proposal that I should strike his name out of the contract and substitute yours, is simply breath-bereaving.

However, I have no prejudice against you, in spite of the fact that I have practically refused another American proposal for two of the plays under the impression that I had a solider arrangement on with Mr. Fawcett. If you can convince me that I *(Miss Marbury that she)* ought *(to advise me)* to deal with you, well and good. *(I shall probably take her advice.)* But in the meantime I shall not delay any fresh business that may present itself.

I should perhaps say that my view of this matter is founded on the relations which exist between the actor-manager and the *acting* (business) manager of an English theatre. These may differ from the relations in American theatres, and I may consequently be taking the matter unreasonably. But if Mr. Bram Stoker were to write to me—"I return the draft agreement with two alterations. I have substituted my own name for Sir Henry Irving's. He is an actor; I *(run his box office)* am his manager; and while I rely on him to play in most of your plays with his company, I think the contract should read in my name"—well, I really don't know what would happen. I should probably faint; and Sir Henry would certainly burst.

Still, you may be the head of a theatre trust in a few years; so far be it from me to quarrel with your breezy adventurousness.

Yours faithfully,

G. Bernard Shaw.

Here was a pretty mess indeed. Mr. Shaw was quite right in suspecting that there is a vast difference between the relations of the English acting manager with the actor-manager, and the American business manager of a theatrical company. The advance agent of to-day, in America, is the manager of to-morrow. Charles Frohman acted as advance agent for stars before owning shows of his own; so did Charles Dillingham, who started with nothing and now is worth millions. A. L. Erlanger, foremost theatrical producer in America to-day, started unostentatiously as a business manager ahead of a show; and the same is true of all the other enterprising, energetic men who control the amusement world to-day. I pointed all this out in a letter to Shaw; I explained that I was a young and ambitious man of 25 and wanted to branch out and be someone in the theatrical world; that the whole scheme which had met with his approval—and Mr. Fawcett's disapproval—was my own; that while Fawcett lacked faith in his plays, I did not; and that while my standing was not triple AAA in Bradstreet, I was ready and willing to risk my little all in carrying through the venture as originally planned, with the aid of Harrison Grey Fiske, if he would trust me with the direction of his plays—which after all would not be such a terrible sacrifice since no one else in America seemed to want them. In reply came this classic—

Letter No. 4

10 Adelphi Terrace, London, W. C.
16th September, 1902.

Dear Sir:

Twenty-five! That explains it. And now the only question is, who is to take care of you until you are thirty-five and are beginning to have some sense?

Meanwhile, if you intend to meddle in theatrical management, the first thing you have to realize is that your friends and managers who distrust the "literary" drama, are perfectly right. Many of them may have begun like you, with romantic notions about producing high class works, and perhaps even a conviction that the authors of these works would feel bound by their principles to accept their inexperience as sufficient security for their capacity and financial resources. If so, they must have quickly discovered two things: first, that placing an article on the market for which there's no effective demand, a blunder which would not make an ordinary commercial firm wink, may easily ruin a manager utterly within a couple of months; and second, that an author may not only lose the fruit of a year's work, but discredit himself for years, by letting his plays fall into unqualified hands. Suppose a young man of twenty-five came to you and asked you for an engagement to play a principal part in one of my plays on the ground that he was a great admirer of my writings, and, on your asking him what his qualifications for leading business were, told you he was sorry to see that he had been mistaken in your principles, and went indignantly away, would it not seem to you that the youth was a romantic young donkey? Well, that is exactly what you have done to me. And as a matter of fact, you *are* a romantic young donkey; and that is why I give myself the trouble of pointing out the fact to you; for such beginnings, however ridiculous they seem to the principal at the time, often turn out rather well; and *you may prove useful later on.*

In theatrical management, there are two roads to success —to possible though very improbable success. The easiest is to give the average theatre-goer what he is sure to like. It would be safer to keep a saloon; but the principle is the same; for just as you can depend absolutely upon men wanting drink, so you can depend on them wanting certain types of melodrama and exhibitions of pretty women. The disadvantage of this line is, that as it is only a matter of business organization and expenditure, anybody can compete with you, and a big trust can compete destructively with anybody. But the overwhelming success of the trust is the opportunity of the manager who is a bit of an artist. The trust can only handle broadly popular work; and it is just possible now that a local man, with sufficient taste and determination, might form a stock company to do select plays, and, by giving up the big public just as frankly as the givers of concerts of classical music do, make himself an institution in his town and in a carefully selected circuit of other towns containing a class ambitious of culture. This would be no easy job; and it will not be tried in earnest (except by some gifted or infatuated enthusiast) until the trust closes every other opening. Now, when you wrote to me, it struck me that this was what was happening to Mr. Fawcett—that he was beginning to find out that the big public business—"Ben Hur" and so forth—was passing farther and farther out of the reach of the local individual manager, and that the only chance in the future lay with the man who, being an artist as well as an entrepreneur, could appreciate and corner work lying above the trust level —work which the trusts, even when its excellence was admitted, would still not meddle with because the class which supported it would be too small for their operations, though large enough to keep an individual manager going.

It now turns out that this imaginery new leparture was only a little romance of your own, and that poor Mr. Fawcett, so far from having any desperate designs on the cultured classes, knows nothing of my plays except what every manager knows: namely, the names of the two which

have been played by Richard Mansfield—and these, as you would know if your fair young head were not still covered with peachbloom, he has no more read than you have read the Institutes of Calvin. When you broke your project to him and he told you what you were—I cannot quote the exact words, as I am not acquainted with the ordinary strength of Mr. Fawcett's language; but no doubt he was pretty frank and forcible—you, like a disingenuous young rascal as you are, would not own up, and proceeded gravely to explain to me what sort of people ordinary managers are, and *generally to teach your grand-mother to milk ducks.* Well, I don't mind that; I have been just like that myself; and yet you see I have done pretty well considering. In fact, I have never known a man to distinguish himself out of the ordinary grooves who did not begin making an ass out of himself more or less. So do not be discouraged or huffy; and don't resent my rudeness, but get what you can out of it, and throw away what you have no use for. Above all, clear your head of audacities and splendid rebukes, and all other dramatizations of our respective positions and remember that you are a man, nothing more or less, and have as good a chance as anybody else, and that I am precisely the same sort of article.

And now, as I have wasted much more time on you than I can spare, I give you my blessing, and invite you to reopen the negotiations, if you feel still inclined, not sooner than 1912 and not later than 1917. By that time you will know what you are doing sufficiently to justify a conscientious man in letting you risk your little all on the classical modern drama.

Yours sincerely,

G. Bernard Shaw.

(By way of parenthesis, I may mention that in the spring of 1913, having accumulated a sufficient bankroll which could have been used for this occasion; I wrote Mr. Shaw as per his promise to reopen the negotiations; I offered to produce any play he might

make available to me, in a first class Broadway theatre, with a cast to meet with his approval—and I received—NO ANSWER WHATEVER. Which shows that his offer to reopen negotiations later was not sincere. Meanwhile of course he had become famous, had made a fortune from his other plays, and was on the highway to Success. His little suggestion that *"I (you) might prove useful later on,"* was not remembered.

"To teach your grand-mother to milk ducks." So that was what I had been doing all the time. Praise for the splendid scheme I had evolved when he thought it was backed by Mr. Fawcett's coin—abuse when he found that my bank balance was not sufficiently large. Extricating himself from an awkward position by the pseudo-benevolent attitude of a Father John. Sadly I wrote him:

Dear George:

(Drop the Bernard—two names are enough for one playbill.)

I think you have shown, in your letters to me, much more of yourself than you are aware of. In several brazen phrases the charlatan stands revealed—not the amusing charlatan with the pretty wit that the "artistic people" love to prate about, but a thing much more trivial and sordid. I was struck especially by one of your sentences. The poor, fatuous, berouged and bespangled tumbler stands admiring himself and chuckling: "Well, I don't mind that. I have been just like that myself, and yet you see I have done pretty well considering."

Pardon me if I decline the honor of standing with you on the mountebank's platform. You are mistaken. I had no idea of daubing my face with white and red, and beating on a drum in order to draw the public into a penny show. I was moved (it may seem incredible to you) by an honest desire to produce plays that are not commonplace. And

your plays seemed good ones with which to begin; not great plays, but plays with a fresh point of view and written in a crisp style. In the country of those without feet, the one-footed are something like kings: and your plays, to me at least, had one foot.

My liking for them is still with me, but your letters are certainly a sad commentary on your plays and cheapen them considerably. I wish the "artistic people" could have an opportunity of studying your private style as exemplified in your letters to me. Don't you think it would be a great step in the spreading of taste and reticence in literary style, to publish them? I have to thank you for one thing: for introducing me to the elegant expression "*to teach your grandmother to milk ducks.*" I have pondered for hours over this Isaac Waltonian heading for an introduction to your letters: *Reasons for the Amazing Celerity with which Some Fish jump at Unpromising Bait, with a Minute and Diverting Study of Their Movements when they Try to Disgorge.*"

One more letter and the incident is closed:

Manhattan Theatre,
New York, Sept. 9, 1902.

Dear Mr. Page:

I have received your letter of September 5th. In the one negotiation I had with Mr. Shaw several years ago, I found him an utterly impossible man, erratic and greedy and unreliable, so your experience with him is not out of the common. However, it is useless to consider the plays further in the circumstances. Yours sincerely,

Harrison Grey Fiske.

* * * *

And thus the Shaw "Festival" or "Cycle" came to naught. Mr. Shaw's expertness and dexterity at milking ducks was realized two years later when the Shaw epidemic broke out and he obtained full value for all the eggs he had so carefully nursed.

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Page, William A.
Behind the curtains of the Broadway beauty trust.

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